

FRITZ LEIBER'S Greatest New Gray Mouser Tale

THE TWO BEST THIEVES IN LANKHMAR

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SWORD AND SORCERY—OR SWORD AND SCIENCE?

EDITORIAL by HARRY HARRISON

"Take that you Alpha Centaurian swine!" Carter Thoris grated through clenched teeth as, with the hyper-trained skill of a master swordsman, he drove the gleaming length of his blade into the armored thorax of the Captain—who shuddered, and died. With his death the resistance died as well and the mighty starship was theirs.

The preceding paragraph is a fine example of swashbuckling in space, with the mighty thews of the hero carving his way through the enemy to certain victory. Now, with a few slight changes it might emerge as this:

"Take that you Alpha Centaurian swine!" Carter Thoris grated through his clenched teeth as, with the hyper-trained skill of the master marksman, he fired a burning laser beam into the armored thorax of the Captain

Here, with change of weapons, the swashbuckling becomes space opera—and both might be called examples of the sword and science school of writing. But what about this?

"Take that you Cimmerian swine!" Carter Thoris grated through his clenched teeth as, with the hyper-skill of a natural swordsman, he drove the gleaming length of his enchanted blade into the magically armored body of the sorcerer

Does this little exercise in writing virtuosity prove anything other than the fact that your editor knows how to type with two fingers? It does. It shows that all material is interchangeable to a degree, and that fantasy and science fiction are not that far apart. Of course some stories can be pointed out as examples of pure fantasy—and others have to be science fiction. But what about that vast middle ground? How would you classify all the stories that took place on Venus—in the swamps amidst the endless fogs? They may have been written as science fiction but they are the wildest fantasy now.

Here in FANTASTIC we draw no hard and fast rules. If it is good we print it—and if you want to categorize our stories please go right ahead. We like to play it loose. We like to take one of the top science fiction authors, then have him write fantasy for us. It is quality that counts and you will find that neck deep in the latest in the saga of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser—THE TWO BEST THIEVES IN LANKHMAR by Fritz Leiber.

Any fan with a good memory—or a large collection—will remember the name Charles R. Tanner. Stories such as TUMITHAK OF THE CORRIDORS or TUMITHAK IN SHAWM will never be forgotten, even though they were originally published back

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THE TWO BEST THIEVES IN LANKHMAR

FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrated by JEFF JONES



The epic saga of FAFHRD and the GRAY MOUSER continues here with an incident of evil where the thieves, in their eternal battle to get some value for their loot, must find a fence to buy it

Through the mazy avenues and alleys of the great city of Lankhmar, Night was a-slink, though not yet grown tall enough to whirl her black star-studded cloak across the sky, which still showed pale, towering wreaths of sunset.

The hawkers of drugs and strong drinks forbidden by day had not yet taken up their bell-tinklings and thin enticing cries. The pleasure girls had not lit their red lanterns and sauntered insolently forth. Bravoes, desperadoes, procurers, spies, pimps, con men, and other malfeasors yawned and rubbed

drowsy sleep from eyes yet thick-lidded. In fact, most of the Night People were still at breakfast.

While most of the Day People were at supper. Which made for an emptiness and hush in the streets, suitable to Night's slippered tread. And which created a large bare stretch of dark thick, unpierced wall at the intersection of Silver Street with the Street of the Gods, a crossing-point where there habitually foregather the junior executives and star operatives of the Thieves Guild, along with the few freelance thieves bold and resourceful enough to defy the Guild and the few thieves of aristocratic birth, sometimes most brilliant amateurs, whom the Guild tolerates and even toadies to, on account of their noble ancestry, which dignifies a very old but most disreputable profession.

Midway along the bare stretch of wall, where none might conceivably overhear, a very tall and a somewhat short thief drifted together. After a while they began to converse in prison-yard whispers.

A distance had grown between Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser during a long and uneventful trek south from the Great Rift Valley, where they had won from two grateful princesses a large pouch of unique jewels, which were utterly invisible by day, but at night or in twilight glowed like topazes, amethysts, rubies, and diamonds of the purest. This mutual mild enmity was due simply to too much of each other and to an ever more bickering disagreement as to how the invisible jewels, gift of Hirriwi and Keyaira, might most advantageously be disposed

of—a dispute which had finally grown so acrimonious that they had divided the jewels, each carrying his share. And when they finally reached Lankhmar, they had lodged each apart and made his own contact with jeweler, fence, or private buyer. This separation had made their relationship quite scratchy, but in no way diminished their absolute trust in each other.

"Greetings, Little Man," Fafhrd growled. "So you've come to sell your share to Ogo the Blind, or at least give him a viewing?—if such expression may be used of a sightless man."

"How did you know that?" the Mouser whispered sharply.

"It was the obvious thing to do," Fafhrd answered somewhat condescendingly. "Sell the jewels to a dealer who could note neither their night-glow nor daytime invisibility. A dealer who must judge them by weight, feel, and what they can be scratched by or scratch. Besides, we stand just across from the door to Ogo's den. It's very well guarded, by the by—at fewest, ten Mingol swordsmen."

"Give me credit at least for such trifles of common knowledge," the Mouser answered sardonically. "Well, you guessed right: It appears that by long association with me you've gained some knowledge of how my wit works, though I doubt that it's sharpened your own a whit. Yes, I've already had one conference with Ogo, and tonight we conclude the deal."

Fafhrd asked equably, "Is it true that Ogo conducts all his interviews in pitchy dark?"

"Ho! So there are some few things you admit not knowing! Yes, it's quite true, which makes any interview with Ogo risky work. By insisting on darkness absolute, Ogo the Blind cancels at a stroke the interviewer's advantage—indeed, the advantage passes to Ogo, since he is used by a lifetime of it to utter darkness—a long lifetime, since he's an ancient one, to judge by his speech. Nay, Ogo knows not what darkness is, since it's all he's ever known. However, I've a device to trick him there if need be. In my thick, tightly draw-stringed pouch I carry fragments of brightest glow-wood, and can spill them out in a trice."

Fafhrd nodded admiringly and then asked, "And what's in that flat case you carry so tightly under your elbow? An elaborate false history of each of the jewels embossed in ancient parchments for Ogo's fingers to read?"

"There your guess fails! No, it's the jewels themselves, guarded in clever wise so that they cannot be filched. Here, take a peek." And after glancing quickly to either side and overhead, the Mouser opened the case a hand's-breadth on its hinges.

Fafhrd saw the rainbow-twinkling jewels firmly affixed in artistic pattern to a bed of black velvet, but all closely covered by an inner top consisting of a mesh of stout iron wire.

The Mouser clapped the case shut. "On our first meeting, I took two of the smallest of the jewels from their spots in the box and let Ogo feel and otherwise test them. He may dream of filching them all, but my box and the mesh thwart that."

"Unless he steals from you the box itself." Fafhrd agreed. "Now as for myself, I keep my share of the jewels chained to me." And after such precautionary glances as the Mouser had made, he thrust back his loose left sleeve, showing a stout browned-iron bracelet snapped around his wrist. From the bracelet hung a short chain which both supported and kept tight shut a small, bulging pouch. The leather of the pouch was everywhere sewed across with fine brown wire. He unclicked the bracelet, which opened on a hinge, then clicked it fast again.

"The browned-iron wire's to foil any cutpurse," Fafhrd explained off-handedly, pulling down his sleeve.

The Mouser's eyebrows rose. Then his gaze followed them as it went from Fafhrd's wrist to his face, while the small man's expression changed from mild approval to bland inquiry. He asked, "And you trust such devices to guard your half of the gems from Nemia of the Dusk?"

"How did you know my dealings were with Nemia?" Fafhrd asked in tones just the slightest surprised.

"Because she's Lankhmar's only woman fence, of course. All know you favor women when possible, in business as well as erotic matters. Which is one of your greatest failings, if I may say so. Also, Nemia's door lies next to Ogo's, though that's a trivial clue. You know, I presume that seven Kleshite stranglers protect her somewhat over-ripe person? Well, at least then you know the sort of trap you're rushing into. Deal with a woman!—surest route to disaster. By the by, you mentioned 'dealings.' Does that plural mean this is not your first interview with her?"

Fafhrd nodded. "As you with Ogo . . . incidentally, am I to understand that you trust men simply simply because they're men? That were a greater failing than the one you impute to me. Anyhow as you with Ogo, I go to Nemia of the Dusk a second time, to complete our deal. The first time I showed her the gems in a twilit chamber, where they appeared to greatest advantage, twinkling just enough to seem utterly real. D'cd you know, in passing, that she always works in twilight or soft gloom?—which accounts for the second half of her name. At all events, as soon as she glimpsed them, Nemia greatly desired the gems—her breath actually caught in her throat—and she agreed at once to my price, which is not low, as basis for further bargaining. However, it happens that she invariably follows the rule—which I myself consider a sound one—of never completing a transaction of any sort with a member of the sex opposite without first testing them in amorous commerce. Hence this second meeting. If the member be old or otherwise ugly, Nemia deputes the task to one of her maids, but in my case, of course . . ." Fafhrd coughed modestly. "One more point I'd like to make: 'over-ripe' is the wrong expression. 'Full-bloomed' or 'the acme of maturity' is what you're looking for."

"Believe me, I'm sure Nemia is in the fullest bloom—a late August flower. Such women always prefer twilight for the display of their 'perfectly matured' charms," the Mouser answered somewhat stifledly. He had for some time been hard put to restrain laughter, and now it

appeared in quiet little bursts as he said. "Oh, you great fool! And you've actually agreed to go to bed with her? And expect not to be parted from your jewels (including family jewels?), let alone not strangled, while at that disadvantage? Oh, this is worse than I thought."

"I'm not always at such a disadvantage in bed as some people may think," Fafhrd answered with quiet modesty. "With me, amorous play sharpens instead of dulls the senses. I trust you have as much luck with a man in ebon darkness as I with a woman in soft gloom. Incidentally, why must you have two conferences with Ogo? Not Nemia's reason, surely?"

The Mouser's grin faded and he lightly bit his lip. With elaborate casualness he said, "Oh, the jewels must be inspected by the Eyes of Ogo—his invariable rule. But whatever test is tried, I'm prepared to out-trick it."

Fafhrd pondered, then asked, "And who are, or is, the Eyes of Ogo? Does he keep a pair of them in his pouch?"

"Is," the Mouser said. Then with even more elaborate casualness, "Oh, some chit of a girl, I believe. Supposed to have an intuitive faculty where gems are concerned. Interesting, isn't it, that a man clever as Ogo should believe such superstitious nonsense? Or depend on the soft sex in any fashion. Truly, a mere formality."

"'Chit of a girl,'" Fafhrd mused, nodding his head again and yet again and yet again. "That describes to a red dot on each of her immature nipples the sort of female you've come to favor in recent years. But of

course the amorous is not at all involved in this deal of yours, I'm sure," he added, rather too solemnly.

"In no way whatever," the Mouser replied, rather too sharply. Looking around, he remarked, "We're getting a bit of company, despite the early hour. There's Dickon of the Thieves Guild, that old pen-pusher and drawer of the floor plans of houses to be robbed—I don't believe he's actually worked on a job since the Year of the Snake. And there's fat Grom, their sub-treasurer, another armchair thief. Who's that comes so dramatically a-slither?—by the Black Bones, it's Snarve, our overlord Glipkerio's nephew! Who's that he speaks to?—oh, only Tork the Cutpurse."

"And there now appears," Fafhrd took up, "Vlek, said to be the Guild's star operative these days. Note his smirk and hear how his shoes creak faintly. And there's that gray-eyed, black-haired amateur Alyx the Picklock—well, at least her boots don't squeak and I rather admire her courage in adventuring here, where the Guild's animosity toward freelance females is as ill a byword as that of the Pimps Guild. And, just now turning from the Street of the Gods, who have we but Countess Kronia of the Seventy-seven Secret Pockets, who steals by madness, not method. There's one bone-bag I'd never trust, despite her emaciated charms and the weakness you lay to me."

Nodding, the Mouser pronounced, "And such as these are called the aristocracy of thief-dom! In all honesty I must say that notwithstanding your weaknesses—which I'm glad

you admit—one of the two best thieves in Lankhmar now stands beside me. While the other, needless to say, occupies my ratskin boots."

Fafhrd nodded back, though carefully crossing two fingers.

Glancing south along Silver Street, where a pale star shone close to the horizon, the Mouser went on briskly, "Well, it's time for my interview with Ogo—and his silly-girl Eyes. Take your sword to bed with you, I advise, and look to it that neither Graywand nor your vitaler blade are filched from you in Nemia's dusk."

"Oh, so first twinkle of the Whale Star is the time set for your appointment too?" Fafhrd remarked, himself stirring from the wall. "Tell me, is the true appearance of Ogo known to anyone? Somehow the name makes me think of a fat, old, and overlarge spider."

"Curb your imagination, if you please," the Mouser answered sharply. "Or keep it for your own business, where I'll remind you that the only dangerous spider is the female. No, Ogo's true appearance is unknown. But perhaps tonight I'll discover it!"

"I'd like you to ponder that your besetting fault is overcuriosity," said Fafhrd, "and that you can't trust even the stupidest girl to be always silly."

The Mouser turned impulsively and said, "However tonight's interviews fall out, let's rendezvous after. The Silver Eel?"

Fafhrd nodded and they gripped hands together. Then each rogue sauntered toward his fateful door.

THE MOUSER stood crouched a

little, every sense a-quiver, in space utterly dark. On a surface before him—a table, he had felt it out to be—lay his jewel box, closed. His left hand touched the box. His right gripped Cat's Claw and with that weapon nervously threatened the inky darkness all around.

A voice which was at once dry and thick, croaked from behind him, "Open the box!"

The Mouser's skin crawled at the horror of that voice. Nevertheless, he complied with the direction. The rainbow light of the meshed jewels spilled upward, dimly showing the room to be low-ceilinged and rather large. It appeared to be empty except for the table and, indistinct in the far left corner behind him, a dark low shape which the Mouser did not like. It might be a hassock or a fat, round, black pillow. Or it might be . . . The Mouser wished Fafhrd hadn't made his last suggestion.

From ahead of him a rippling, silvery voice quite unlike the first called, "Your jewels, like no others I have ever seen, gleam in the absence of all light."

Scanning piercingly across the table and box, the Mouser could see no sign of the second caller. Evening out his own voice, so it was not breathy with apprehension, but bland with confidence, he said, to the emptiness, "My gems are like no others in the world. In fact, they come not from the world, being of the same substance as the stars. Yet you know by your test that one of them is harder than diamond."

"They are trully unearthly and most beautiful jewels," the sourceless silvery voice answered.

"My mind pierces them through and through, and they are what you say they are. I shall advise Ogo to pay your asking price."

At that instant the Mouser heard behind him a little cough and a dry, rapid scuttling. He whirled around, dirk poised to strike. There was nothing whatever to be seen or sensed. Except for the hassock or whatever, which had not moved. The scuttling no longer was to be heard.

He swiftly turned turned back, and there across the table from him, her front illuminated by the twinkling jewels, stood a slim naked girl with pale straight hair, somewhat darker skin, and overlarge eyes staring entrancedly from a child's tiny-chinned, pouty-lipped face.

Satisfying himself by a rapid glance that the jewels were in their proper pattern under their mesh and none missing, he swiftly advanced Cat's Claw so that its needle point touched the taut skin between the small yet jutting breasts.

"Do not seek to startle me so again!" he hissed. "Men—aye, and girls—have died for less."

The girl did not stir by so much as the breadth of a fine hair, neither did her expression nor her dreamy yet concentrated gaze change, except that her short lips smiled, then parted to say honey-voiced, "So you are the Gray Mouser. I had expected a crouchy, sear-faced rogue, and I find . . . a prince." The very jewels seemed to twinkle more wildly because of her sweet voice and sweeter presence, striking opalescent glimmers from her pale irises.

"Neither seek to flatter me!" the

Mouser commanded, catching up his box and holding it open against his side. "I am innured, I'll have you know, to the ensorcelments of all the world's minxes and nymphs."

"I speak truth only, as I did of your jewels," she answered guilelessly. Her lips had stayed parted a little and she spoke without moving them.

"Are you the Eyes of Ogo?" the Mouser demanded harshly, yet drawing Cat's Claw back from her bosom. It bothered him a little, yet only a little, that the tiniest stream of blood, like a black thread, led down for a few inches from the prick his dirk had made.

Utterly unmindful of the tiny wound, the girl nodded. "And I can see through you, as through your jewels, and I discover naught in you but what is noble and fine, save for certain small subtle impulses of violence and cruelty, which a girl like myself might find delightful."

"There your all-piercing eyes err wholly, for I am a great villain," the Mouser answered scornfully, though he felt a pulse of fond satisfaction within him.

The girl's eyes widened as she looked over his shoulder somewhat apprehensively, and from behind the Mouser the dry and thick voice croaked once more, "Keep to business! Yes, I will pay you in gold your offering price, a sum it will take me some hours to assemble. Return at the same time tomorrow night, and we will close the deal. Now shut the box."

The Mouser had turned around, still clutching his box, when Ogo began to speak. Again he could not distinguish the source of the voice,

though he scanned minutely. It seemed to come from the whole wall.

Now he turned back. Somewhat to his disappointment, the naked girl had vanished. He peered under the table, but there was nothing there. Doubtless some trap door or hypnotic device . . .

Still suspicious as a snake, he returned the way he had come. On close approach, the black hassock appeared to be only that. Then as the door to the outside slid open noiselessly, he swiftly obeyed Ogo's last injunction, snapping shut the box, and departed.

FAFHRD gazed tenderly at Nemia lying beside him in perfumed twilight, while keeping the edge of his vision on his brawny wrist and the pouch pendant from it, both of which his companion was now idly fondling.

To do Nemia justice, even at the risk of imputing a certain cattiness to the Mouser, her charms were neither "over-blown," nor even "ample," but only . . . sufficient.

From just behind Fafhrd's shoulder came a spitting hiss. He quickly turned his head and found himself looking into the crossed blue eyes of a white cat standing on the small bedside table beside a bowl of bronze chrysanthemums.

"I X Y!" Nemia called remonstratingly yet languorously.

Despite her voice, Fafhrd heard behind him, in rapid succession, the click of a bracelet opening and the slightly louder click of one closing.

He turned back instantly, to discover only that Nemia had meanwhile clasped on his wrist, beside the browned-iron bracelet, a

golden one around which sapphires and rubies marched alternately in single file.

Gazing at him from betwixt the strands of her long dark hair, she said huskily, "It is only a small token which I give to those who please me . . . greatly."

Fafhrd drew his wrist closer to his eyes to admire his prize, but mostly to palpate his pouch with the fingers of his other hand, to assure himself that it bulged tightly as ever.

It did, and in a burst of Generous feeling he said, "Let me *give* you one of my gems in precisely the same spirit" and made to undo his pouch.

Nemria's long-fingered hand glided out to prevent. "No," she breathed. "Let never the gems of business be mixed with the jewels of pleasure. Now if you should choose to bring me some small gift tomorrow night, when at the same hour we exchange your jewels for my gold and my letters of credit on Glipkerio, underwritten by Hisvin the Grain Merchant . . ."

"Right," Fafhrd said briefly, concealing the relief he felt. He'd been an idiot to think of giving Nemria one of the gems—and with it a day's opportunity to discover its abnormalities.

"Until tomorrow, Nemria said, opening her arms to him.

"Until tomorrow then," Fafhrd agreed, embracing her fervently, yet keeping his pouch clutched in the hand to which it was chained—and already eager to be gone.

THE SILVER EEL was far less than half filled, its candles few, its cupbearers torpid, as Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser entered simultaneously

by different doors and made for one of the many empty booths.

The only eye to watch them at all closely was a gray one above a narrow section of pale cheek bordered by dark hair, peering past the curtain of the backmost booth.

When their thick table-candles had been lit and cups set before them and a jug of fortified wine, and fresh charcoal tumbled into the red-seeded brazier at table's end, the Mouser set his flat box on the table and grinning said, "All's set. The jewels passed the test of the Eyes—a toothsome wenchlet, more of her later. I get the cash tomorrow night—all my offering price! But you, friend, I hardly thought to see you back alive. Drink we up! I take it you escaped from Nemria's divan whole and sound in organs and limbs—as far as you yet know. But the jewels?"

"They came through too," Fafhrd answered, swinging the pouch lightly out of his sleeve and then back in again. "And I get my money tomorrow night . . . the full amount of my asking price, just like you."

As he named those coincidences, his eyes went thoughtful.

They stayed that way while he took two large swallows of wine. The Mouser watched him curiously.

"At one point," Fafhrd finally mused, "I thought she was trying the old trick of substituting for mine an identical but worthless filled pouch. Since she'd seen the pouch at our first meeting, she could have had a similar one made up, complete with chain and bracelet."

"But was she—?" the Mouser asked.

"Oh no, it turned out to be

something entirely different," Fafhrd said lightly, though some thought kept two slight vertical furrows in his forehead.

"That's odd," the Mouser remarked. "At one point—just one, mind you—the Eyes of Ogo; if she'd been extremely swift, deft, and silent, might have been able to switch boxes on me."

Fafhrd lifted his eyebrows.

The Mouser went on rapidly, "That is, if my box had been closed. But it was open, in darkness, and there'd have been no way to reproduce the vari-colored twinkling of the gems. Phosphorus or glow-wood—Too dim. Hot coals? No, I'd have felt the heat. Besides, how get that way a diamond's pure white glow? Quite impossible."

Fafhrd nodded agreement, but continued to gaze over the Mouser's shoulder.

The Mouser started to reach toward his box, but instead with a small self-contemptuous chuckle picked up the jug and began to pour himself another drink in a careful small stream.

Fafhrd shrugged at last, used the back of his fingers to push over his own pewter cup for a refill, and yawned mightily, leaning back a little and at the same time pushing his spread-fingered hands to either side across the table, as if pushing away from him all small doubts and wonderings.

The fingers of his left hand touched the Mouser's box. His face went blank. He looked down his arm at the box.

Then to the great puzzlement of the Mouser, who had just begun to fill Fafhrd's cup, the Northerner

leaned forward and placed his head ear-down on the box.

"Mouser," he said in a small voice, "your box is buzzing."

Fafhrd's cup was full, but the Mouser kept on pouring. Heavily fragrant wine puddled and began to run toward the glowing brazier.

"When I touched the box, I felt vibration," Fafhrd went on bemusedly. "It's buzzing. It's still buzzing."

With a low snarl, the Mouser slammed down the jug and snatched the box from under Fafhrd's ear. The wine reached the brazier's hot bottom and hissed.

He tore the box open, opened also its mesh top, and he and Fafhrd peered in.

The candlelight dimmed, but by no means extinguished the yellow, violet, reddish, and white twinkling glows rising from various points on the black velvet bottom.

But the candlelight was quite bright enough also to show, at each such point, matching the colors listed, a firebeetle, glow-wasp, nightbee, or diamondfly, each insect alive but delicately affixed to the floor of the box with fine silver wire. From time to time the wings or wingcases of some buzzed.

Without hesitation, Fafhrd unclasped the browned-iron bracelet from his wrist, unchained the pouch, and dumped it on the table.

Jewels of various sizes, all beautifully cut made a fair heap.

But they were all dead black.

Fafhrd picked up a big one, tried it with his fingernail, then whipped out his hunting knife and with its edge easily scored the gem.

He carefully dropped it in the

brazier's glowing center. After a bit it flamed up yellow and blue.

"Coal," Fafhrd said.

The Mouser clawed his hands over his faintly twinkling box, as if about to pick it up and hurl it through the wall and across the Inner Sea.

Instead he unclawed his hands and hung them decorously at his sides.

"I am going away," he announced quietly, but very clearly, and did so.

Fafhrd did not look up. He was dropping a second black gem in the brazier.

He did take off the bracelet Nemia had given him, bring it close to his eyes, say, "Brass . . . glass," and spread his fingers to let it drop in the spilt wine. After the Mouser was gone, Fafhrd drained his brimming cup, drained the Mouser's and filled it again, then went on supping from it as he continued to drop the black jewels one by one in the brazier and watch each flame.

NEMIA and the Eyes of Ogo sat cozily side by side on a luxurious divan. They had put on negligee. A few candles made a yellowish dusk.

On a low, gleaming table were set delicate flagons of wines and liqueurs, slim-stemmed crystal goblets, golden plates of sweetmeats and savories, and in the center two equal heaps of rainbow-glowing gems.

"What a quaint bore barbarians are," Nemia remarked, delicately stifling a yawn, "though good for one's sensuous self, once in a great while. This one had a little more brains than most. I think he might have caught on, except that I made the two clicks come so exactly

together when I snapped back on the bracelet with the false pouch and at the same time my brass keepsake. It's amazing how barbarians are hypnotized by brass along with any odd bits of glass colored like rubies and sapphires—I think the three primary colors paralyze their primitive brains."

"Clever, clever Nemia," the Eyes of Ogo cooed with a tender caress. "My little fellow almost caught on too when I made the switch, but then he got interested in threatening me with his knife. Actually jabbed me between the breasts. I think he has a dirty mind."

"Let me kiss the blood away, darling Eyes," Nemia suggested. "Oh, dreadful . . . dreadful."

While shivering under her treatment—Nemia had a slightly bristly tongue—Eyes said, "For some reason he was quite nervous about Ogo." She made her face blank, her pouty mouth hanging slightly open.

The richly draped wall opposite her made a scuttling sound and then croaked in a dry, thick voice, "Open your box, Gray Mouser. Now close it. Girls, girls! Cease your lascivious play!"

Nemia and Eyes clung to each other laughing. Eyes said in her natural voice, if she had one, "And he went away still thinking there was a real Ogo. I'm quite certain of that. My, they both must be in a froth by now."

Sitting back, Nemia said, "I suppose we'll have to take some special precautions against their raiding us back to get their jewels."

Eyes shrugged. "I have my five Mingol swordsmen."

Nemia said. "And I have my three and a half Kleshite stranglers."

"Half?" Eyes asked.

"I— was counting Ixy. No, but seriously."

Eyes frowned for half a heartbeat, then shook her head decisively. "I don't think we need worry about Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser raiding us back. Because we're girls, their pride will be hurt, and they'll sulk a while and then run away to the ends of the earth on one of those adventures of theirs."

"Adventures!" said Nemia, as one who says, "Cesspools and privies!"

"You see, they're really weaklings," Eyes went on, warming to her topic. "They have no drive whatever, no ambition, no true passion for money. For instance, if they did—and if they didn't spend so much time in dismal spots away from Lankhmar—they'd have known that the King of Ilthmar has developed a mania for gems that are invisible by day, but glow by night, and has offered half his kingdom for a sack of star-jewels. And then they'd never have had even to consider such an idiotic thing as coming to us."

"What do you suppose he'll do with them? The king I mean."

Eyes shrugged. "I don't know. Built a planetarium. Or eat them." She thought a moment. "All things considered, it might be as well if we got away from here for a few weeks. We deserve a vacation."

Nemia nodded, closing her eyes. "It should be absolutely the opposite sort of place to the one in which the Mouser and Fafhrd will have their next—ugh!—adventure."

Eyes nodded too and said dream-

ly, "Blue skies and rippling water, spotless beach, a tepid wind, flowers and slim slavegirls everywhere . . ."

Nemia said, "I've always wished for a place that has no weather, only perfection. Do you know which half of Ilthmar's kingdom has the least weather?"

"Precious Nemia," Eyes murmured, "You're so civilized. And so very, very clever. Next to one other, you're certainly the best thief in Lankhmar."

"Who's the other? Nemia was eager to know.

"Myself, of course," Eyes answered modestly.

Nemia reached up and tweaked her companion's ear—not too painfully, but enough.

"If there were the least money depending on that," she said quietly but firmly, "I'd teach you differently. But since it's only conversation . . ."

"Dearest Nemia."

"Sweetest Eyes."

The two girls gently embraced and kissed each other fondly.

FAFHRD was drunk, being on his third jug. He had burnt up all the black jewels and was now with the greatest delicacy and carefulest use of the needle-point of his knife, releasing unharmed each of the silver-wired firebeetles, glowwasps, nightbees, and diamondflies. They buzzed about erratically.

Two cupbearers and the chucker-out had come to protest, and now Slevyas himself joined them, rubbing the back of his thick neck. He had been stung and a customer too. Fafhrd had himself been stung twice, but hadn't seemed to notice.

Nor did he now pay the slightest attention to the four harranging him.

The last nightbee was released. It careened off noisily past Slevyas' neck, who dodged his head with a curse. Fafhrd sat back, suddenly looking very wretched. With varying shrugs the master of the Silver Eel and his three servitors made off, one cupbearer making swipes at the air.

Fafhrd tossed up his knife. It came down almost point first, but didn't quite stick in the teak. He laboriously scabbarded it, then forced himself to take a small sip of wine.

(Continued from page 4)

in the early 30's—would you believe over 30 years ago? It was my recent pleasure to meet Mr. Tanner in person at the Ackermansion, home of 4SJ Ackermanster, or Kvar-E, or Fojak—or just plain Forrest J. Ackerman as he is also known. We got to talking and it was Ross Rocklynne, another old timer whose stories you will soon be seeing here and in our sister magazine (or should I say brother?) AMAZING STORIES, who mentioned Charles Tanner's poetry. I raised a very quizzical eyebrow because there is nothing in this world more loathsome than SF and fantasy poetry but, luckily, Mr. Tanner remembers his own verse and recited the opening paragraphs of THE PRINCESS OF MARS. I broke up—since I had not realized until then that his poems are parodies of our old favorites, and are very *very* funny.

I grabbed PRINCESS and you'll find it in this issue. It is meant to be heard and I only wish we could enclose tapes or records but this is

As if someone were about to emerge from the backmost booth, there was a stirring of its heavy curtains, which like all the others had stitched to them heavy chain and squares of metal so that one guest couldn't stab another through them, except with luck and the slimmest of stilettos.

Fafhrd's head rocked forward. His chin rested on his chest. He began to snore.

In the backmost booth, Alyx the Picklock pursed her lips and shook her head disapprovingly. The End

a little beyond even our astronomical budget. However this does not prevent you from reading it aloud at meetings and small fan groups with, I guarantee, excellent results.

Once I had Mr. Tanner this far out of retirement I sent him a copy of a book by his old friend, Doc Smith, which he reviews in this issue. Be sure and notice that it is Charles R. who wrote this review, not LeRoy, the Tanner who reviews for AMAZING. The second Tanner is a well known nuisance and evil influence who was stoned from his college and thrown into the river Cam for certain vile practices. We suffer his corrupting influence in the pages of AMAZING only because he has the despicable habit of being correct when he writes his, otherwise, repellent reviews. Charles R. is a fine, decent, upright, midwest gentleman now settled in California and as far removed from the other Tanner as light from day.

Harry Harrison

FAULT

James Tiptree, Jr.

Out there, moving in slow circles around alien stars, are planets unknown to us now . . . but not forever . . . and when men first trod those distant worlds what different forms of life—and culture—will they find?

You asked me about our passenger, the girl with the dog . . . Try some of this Aurigaean vodka, that grass in the bottle makes it smooth. Like dubrovka. You can drink it all night . . . That's right, she's on her way home to join her husband, she and the dog. Happy? I don't know. Joining this particular husband is something special. Women . . . And the dog. We took them to Shodar.

You know Shodar? That's right, big pink and green shrimps, run their feelers all over your face to talk. Resonance, that's their specialty. The line has started to use them to process gyros. Nobody gets on with them too well, of course, because of that feeler act. But they're all right. You just have to pick who you send there. That's the cause of the Mitchell girl's trouble, really. My fault. I should never have taken a green kid like her husband to Shodar.

It was before I came with this line, three, four years back. I had a light freighter. We picked up a load of resonite, and I knew Shodar paid top price for resonite. Didn't know

much else, nobody did. I should have kept Mitch on the deck. He's a nice kid—still is—but wild. You know the type, something out of an old space opera. Big, curly red hair, great smile, fast boy with his fist. Impulse boy—still is, I guess.

Anyway, we were in a hurry, and he was down unloading. Between lifts he got to mimicking some of the Shodars standing around. You know they emit supersonics? Gets you feeling uneasy and kind of sick-mad when you're around them. Mitch was kidding at one of the little fellows, and out came these feelers and started over his face. Mitch stood it for a minute and then he grabbed a handful and yanked. The Shodar keeled over, and before I knew what had happened they had Mitch. We couldn't do a thing while they carted him away, the supersonics were damn near turning us inside out. Next time we saw Mitch he was in court, in a cage.

I took the portable voder, and we got the main outlines. It seems the little Shodar was somebody's mate,

and what Mitch had done was equivalent to blinding it, plus castrating it, plus a dozen other things—all permanent. I gathered that Mitch got something less than the maximum—they had given him a kind of lawyer—but I couldn't make out exactly what the sentence was. Something about *slipped*. They rolled him out in the cage, still giving us the grin.

We had to wait a day for him, they said. By morning I was expecting a stretcher with a piece of hamburger on it. Instead, here comes Mitch, striding along like a million credits, cap on the back of his head. Even his suit had been pressed.

"Never touched me!" he says. "Jiggle me up some, shined some lights on me. Whatever it is doesn't work on humans, see?"

A big Shodar who had come humping along after him was looking at me. I took the voder down to him—I was the only one who could stand that face-patting.

"What have you done to him?"

"He is—." That word again.

The Shodar pointed at a little cluster of dwellings by themselves across the port. Maybe you noticed it? We'd wondered about the village; the Shodars there never looked at us or responded, although they seemed okay as far as I could see. I figured it for some kind of monastery. Right then, they were over by the fence, staring at the sky.

"Is that a prison?"

"What is that concept?"

"A place for offenders where they are not permitted to leave."

"No. They go there by choice. Our

government gives them that place to be together."

Well, you can guess what I thought. A pest-house.

"You have given our man a sickness?"

"No! No! Not a sickness. He is. . . I see no understanding. You have no —— on your planet." The Shodar stared at me and I thought I detected some emotion, but you can't tell.

"On your home, he will be alone? He has a mate?"

"Yes."

"To stay with the mate. To be very quiet, not to travel. That is longest."

Well, we expressed some more apologies and took off for home fast. Mitch swore that he had had no injections, no gas, never been unconscious, but I threw him into quarantine as well as I could on that tub, and turned the whole shipload in to E.T.D. as soon as we hit orbit.

They took us into custody and went over us with everything they had—nothing wrong. Mitch was in perfect shape so far as anyone could see. The only symptom I thought I noticed was a slight sluggishness. Their tests didn't pick it up, because they had no base-line on him for comparison. Anyway, in a month they turned us loose, all except Mitch, and we took off. Maggie—that's the girl you've seen—stayed with him at the E.T.D. station while they observed some more.

It was about a year and a half before I got back. . . . Some more vodka? E.T.D. called me in. A little blond guy named Bruno, not an M.D.

"Before we talk, Captain, do you

mind if we check you over again, briefly?"

"What's the matter with Mitch?"

"We don't quite know yet. But since you had most contact with him coming back, we'd like to run one more check for contagious effects."

"As long as it's lightly, this time."

It was mostly reflexes they wanted, and I got back to Bruno that night.

"Not contagious. Now we'll go to Mr. Mitchell."

Mitch was fully dressed, reading on his bunk. Bruno stopped me in the doorway. Mitch didn't look up. I had just breathed once when he looked around, then bounced out of bed and grabbed my hand. For a minute we both talked at once, Mitch radiating health and normalcy. Then there was an instant's silence.

"We're sending you home today, as promised, Mr. Mitchell," said Bruno.

Again the tiny silence.

"Great! Well, great!" Mitch exclaimed buoyantly. "John, why don't you come along? Maggie'd love to see you, you know."

"That's exactly what I was going to suggest," said Bruno. "As far as our medics can see, you're absolutely healthy. But I would like Captain James to go with you if he could, just to play it safe."

Later he told me, "I just don't know. He's healthy, all right. It isn't pathological. But it's something. I'm not a doctor, you know, I'm a physicist. If I told you my guess, you'd laugh. All I can go on is what my thinking would be if he were a piece of matter brought to me for, say,

harmonic analysis. Tell me one point in detail, about that village near the port: They were looking at the sky, you said, and there was nothing there? When did they start that?"

Well, we hashed it out in what detail I could recall, which wasn't much. As I said, those Shodars were acting like people on a street when some joker starts staring up at nothing and a crowd joins in. They never had looked at us so far as I knew. What were their ages? Who knew. And so on. One thing he wanted to know—the ground level.

"Completely flat, I think . . . Yes. No, no new construction . . . No vehicles . . . Rain? It doesn't rain there. Climate's about 30°C all the time."

He blew, and sniffed, and polished his big old specs, and then he warned me.

"Now, the trip home. No planes! No monorail, either. A car, I think, and very slowly. Not over fifty kilometers, in fact."

"What?"

"Yes, I mean it. You could damage him gravely . . . or maybe I'm all wrong. But humour me if you care for your man. Start very slowly, too—in fact, make all changes very slowly. Treat him—well, treat him like a viscous liquid, if you understand what I mean."

I didn't, but I promised. Mitch certainly didn't look anything like a viscous liquid, and those fifty-kilometer hours really bugged him. He was the same old Mitch, except for this odd little jerkiness. It took him a second to look at you, and then it took another to look away from you,

and there were these brief silences. And he was slow getting in and out of the car. His walk was odd, too. He moved as fast as ever, seemingly, but somehow he lagged. I took to slowing up, and he looked at me as if puzzled.

"You too," he said. We were coming out of a diner.

"How do you mean?"

"People over there were spooky. Always interrupting me. Jerky. Even you're doing it."

There was one bad moment when we pulled up in front of Mitch's place. Maggie flew out and pulled the car door open. Mitch wasn't ready for her. She half-fell into his lap and pulled his head around, and at the same time Mitch wheeled himself around, almost spilling her. She grabbed his arm and seemed to slip right down it, landing on the drive.

Her eyes were wide, and she stared at her hands for a moment, but there was no harm done. Only, I knew what was bothering her. I had taken Mitch's arm once to hustle him through a door, and it was, well—oily, somehow. But there was no oil, only a rough jacket.

That's about all I noticed then. It was a good visit, even with Mitch going in fits and starts and looking around me. Both Maggie and I knew something was not right, but I hoped time would fix it, and I guess she did too. Time! More vodka?

I got back two years later. Found letter waiting from Maggie, also an official signal from Bruno, who was now chief of something, with a new big lab. I went there first.

"No examinations this time, Captain." He goggled up at me pixie-

like. "We want to engage your professional services for a trip to Shodar. For me and my staff, one way. And for Mrs. Mitchell, to return. I am sorry to say that we now believe we know what is wrong with your friend."

"He's worse."

"Yes. Oh, he's perfectly healthy. But the condition is progressive."

"Will you tell me what's wrong with Mitch? Where is he?"

"He's here. They're both here. You'll see him in a minute. To explain . . . You gave me the clue, Captain, with the word *slipped*. That's what he was, slipped. That and the natives looking up.

"Slipped—?"

"When a thing slips, it is because of a lack of friction holding it to some matrix. The Shodars took away, somehow, some of your friend's friction. Not friction as you think of it—friction in space. No. They modified his friction in time. They have apparently the ability to modify the temporal rate of a living organism, to cut it loose from its binding in the general temporal matrix, by a tiny decrement. Without full friction it slips. Drifts further and further behind, in time."

"But Mitch—he's *here*, isn't he?"

"Here, yes, but behind. The event that takes place now, for you and me, takes place later for Mr. Mitchell. And the gap is widening."

"How much?"

"I estimate that today it is slightly over twenty hours. We don't yet know the form of the curve; hopefully, linear. But the point, Captain, is that there is danger. The intersection of events in normal time with

him can be physically dangerous. That was why I warned you about fast movement, quick changes. The man you see before you is, in some sense, not there . . . and yet, he is. He seems to be present only at points which he *will* occupy. Very sensitive. No changes. We have made a special static environment."

But the point was not, of course, the danger. I saw the point when they took me to Mitch. The same old Mitch, with a new haggard face. He was facing us, reading a hand-written letter.

Bruno held me back. I followed his gaze and saw Maggie sitting like a statue in one corner.

Mitch never gave us a glance. He finished his letter, crumpled it, walked over to Maggie and seized her shoulder. She looked up at him. I guess you could call it smiling.

For a minute nothing happened, and then he burst out roughly,

"It's no good, I've got to talk to you! Maggie—Maggie—don't leave me! Where are you? Maggie?"

He was pawing her shoulder, dragging at her. She tried to rise, to go into his arms, but he went on pawing. One of his arms seemed to slide almost through her head. Then he quieted, as if listening. Presently he sighed and moved away, and she continued to sit leaden, looking at him. Then she seized a piece of newspaper and started to write as we drew back.

"Twenty hours and—let me see, seven point six minutes ago, Mrs. Mitchell attempted to enact her part of that scene—but as you can see, she did not gauge his movements quite accurately. . . . She tries. It's

astonishing, really, her persistence. The notes, you see, she tries to explain it first. You realize of course that he did not perceive her at all as she was just then, he perceived as she was in her past? . . . Extraordinary. She has been very helpful."

The scientific mind. Not that they're all like that. But Mitch was drowning, you might say, in time. Utterly cut off. And she trying to follow him down.

Bruno asked me if I wanted to greet him.

"You mean, go in and talk and shake hands with empty air?"

Well, we compromised on a taped message and I left. They joined me at take-off. Several government research groups had combined on the charter. Bruno's there on the planet now, learning all about Shodar resonance theory. The old face-patters didn't seem to bother him a bit.

Mrs. Mitchell? Well, of course they hoped the thing could be reversed. Mitch could no longer be moved at all, but there was money to bring Shodar technicians and equipment back if something could be done. The Shodars were willing, even the one Mitch had mutilated. I think no one had realized Mitch would be alone. But nothing could be done. They can't hook you back in again, once you've been slipped. They're working. Maybe they can at least hold it where it is now . . . about three days now, more by the time they get something. Notes and tapes . . . and shadows that don't see him, that's his world. There's still some vodka left—or how about drambuie to finish off with?

(Continued on page 142)



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Horror out of Carthage

EDMOND HAMILTON

Illustrated by JAY JACKSON

Ever wonder where those old "horror" movies originate? We're not claiming they all came from the pen of Ed Hamilton, but here is what may very well be the original plot idea for all of them. There's this old archeologist see, and he has a beauteous daughter and they're on this dig when all-of-a-sudden .

Chapter I

From the Buried Past

KENNETH Blaine felt the girl beside him shiver as she looked out at the raw, newly-excavated trenches and pits that lay baking in the sullen African sunset.

"Ken, I wish dad had never heard of Carthage," said Edith Kerr suddenly. "This place is getting on my nerves."

The tall young archaeologist turned and looked down at the girl with surprise on his serious, clean-cut face.

"Why, Edith, what's the matter?"

"The Romans cursed Carthage when they destroyed it, didn't they?" said the girl. "Well, I feel that we're digging up that curse again. That something sinister is happening here —to me."

Edith's smooth, taffy-yellow bobbed hair came only to Blaine's shoulder. In her short white linen

dress, with her sun-tanned bare arms and legs, she looked like a carefree, pretty schoolgirl. But her ordinarily fun-loving blue eyes were clouded with deep emotion now as she stared down at the busy scene below.

She and the young archaeologist stood on the slope of a low, time-rounded green hill. Behind them lay the flat-roofed, gleaming white villa that served as headquarters for the Western University Carthage Expedition, which had come half around the world from America to dig for the most mysterious of ancient cities.

In front of Blaine and the girl, green fields sloped down to the labyrinth of raw new excavations in which a multitude of white-robed Arab laborers were languidly plying pick and spade. Beyond lay the blue sheet of the Gulf of Tunis, its farther shore guarded by dim violet mountains.

This scene held a fascination for Blaine. On this very spot, centuries before the birth of Christ, had reared

the massive walls and towers and temples of Carthage, cruel, mistress of the seas. Here a fantastic, barbaric civilization had reached its climax, and had been finally destroyed with utter completeness by conquering Rome.

But now there was anxiety in Kenneth Blaine's serious dark eyes as he looked down at the girl.

"Something sinister happening to you?" he repeated worriedly. "What do you mean?"

Edith tried to speak lightly, but he saw the faint dread that shadowed her blue eyes as she looked up at him.

"Ken, I don't know just what is happening to me. But for the last two nights I've felt it—a queer and rather horrible dream. A dream in which someone or something keeps trying to push me out of my body."

She laughed uncomfortably. "I know it sounds crazy. But it's pretty terrifying. I can feel that other person, that other mind, exerting a tremendous mental push on my own mind to make me leave my body. Each time, I seemed actually on the point of being forced out of my body—and then I'd wake up and realize it was just a nightmare."

Her small tanned hand tightened on the sleeve of his white suit, and her lips quivered a little.

"It's a bad sensation, Ken. Someone trying to force you out of your body! Even though it's only a dream—I don't like it."

He patted her hand. "I wouldn't worry about a bad dream, Edith," he reassured her. "It's just the psychological influence of this place. Here we are, digging up a place where there was once more cruelty and torture and horrible death than

anywhere else on earth. It's natural you're affected by this atmosphere."

"Still, I don't like such dreams," Edith murmured. "I wish we could leave here—I almost wish dad would give up these excavations—"

"And a fine wish that is for an archaeologist's daughter!" broke in a booming, outraged voice. "What's the matter with you? Getting homesick?"

Kenneth Blaine turned. Doctor John Kerr had come up the slope to them, a massive, stocky figure, his white pith helmet in his hand, his stiff shock of iron-gray hair bare as he mopped his genial red face with a handkerchief.

Down at the foot of the slope, the thin figure of old Abel McPherson was to be seen dismissing the dark-faced Arab laborers, his rasping voice floating up to them.

"Here we are trying to uncover old Carthage," Doctor Kerr was growling at his daughter, "and you hope we'll fail, so you can go back home!"

Blaine asked the senior archaeologist, "There's no sign yet of the Temple of Moloch?"

"No, not a trace," Kerr answered gloomily. "Darn the Romans, anyway! They surely did a complete job of destroying Carthage when they took it. Killed the people, and burned the buildings, and then plowed up the ground where they had stood. No wonder we've spent two months here without finding that temple."

He turned and bellowed down the slope to Abel McPherson, who was climbing toward them. "Come on, Mac—a shower and a good dinner will make us feel better about it."

"I'm coming," the dour-faced old

Scotsman answered in his rasping burr. "I'm not as young as ye are, remember."

As Blaine and Edith followed the two senior archaeologists back through the sunset to the villa, the girl spoke.

"Don't tell dad anything about my dreams, Ken. He's getting discouraged enough without having me to worry about."

Blaine nodded thoughtfully. "He was so sure that we could find the Temple of Moloch. And it doesn't look as though we can. Yet, Edith, if these queer nightmares are upsetting you—"

"They aren't," the girl said quickly. "I just had a little fit of nerves, or I wouldn't have mentioned them. And you're not to worry about me."

Blaine could not help worrying. Lying in his dark, hot little bedroom in the villa that night, he kept remembering the weird experience of which Edith had told him. That uncanny sensation or dream of someone trying to supplant her in her own body.

A strange idea, that! Not a new one—in all ages, there had been people who claimed to have secret knowledge of how to make thier minds, their personalities, leave their own body and enter another. But of course that was all just legend. Edith was just getting jumpy because of the oppressive psychological atmosphere of this place.

Blaine had himself felt the subtle shadow of that influence. As though a chilling, numbing spell reached out from this site of the vanished, barbaric metropolis of long ago, the dark city of cruelty and rites unmentionable, where living children had been

fed to fiery Moloch, where high-born virgins had made unholy sacrifice to Tanit, where prisoners of war had been crucified, and an evil people had rioted in cruelty and lust until their city fell.

Blaine told himself restlessly that he too would soon be jittery if he let himself dwell on the dark horrors of old Carthage. An archaeologist ought to be objective. The blood and pain and sadism that had weltered here in the old Punic city had passed long ago. The white stars peering through his window had not seen that black, accursed metropolis for more than two thousand years.

But still Blaine could not sleep. He gave up the effort and climbed out of bed, thrusting his feet into his slippers and reached in the dark for his cigarettes. Then, careful not to arouse the others, he walked out through the dark villa and stood in his pajamas on the terrace in front, smoking.

The black, velvet night was moonless, a wonderful sky of stars tenting the sleeping world. In the starlight, the churned-up earth of the excavations down the slope was a vague obscurity. Beyond it slept the glimmering waters of the gulf, with the black masses of the mountains on the shore standing silent guard.

Blaine stared. Tonight there was something brooding and sentient about this lonely scene. As though the towers and battlements of old Carthage itself haunted the site of their ancient glory. As though the hell of human passions that had once raged in this place still vibrated in the hushed night.

He heard the door behind him open and turned quickly. Edith was

coming out onto the starlit terrace.

"Edith, what's the matter?" Blaine asked anxiously as he went toward her. "Did your dreams bother you again?"

She stared up at him without replying. It seemed to Kenneth Blaine that her face was queerly white and strained, her eyes abnormally wide and dark in the dim light.

A thrill of fear pierced him as he looked down into her white, strange face.

"Edith, what's wrong?" he asked sharply. "It's I—Kenneth."

Edith spoke then. Her voice came hesitant and slow, as though she found the words with an effort.

"Kenneth—Kenneth Blaine," she said slowly, as if saying the name for the first time. "I remember, now. Of course."

She smiled up at him, a slow, heavy-lidded and half-mocking smile that he had never seen on her face before.

"Kenneth Blaine—who is in love with me," she said in that slow way, and then laughed throatily.

He stared at her, astounded. But Edith had turned and was now looking toward the starlit shore and sea.

He saw a strange, haunting look come into her changed white face as she gazed.

"Gone," she whispered, as though to herself. "Temples and towers and gods and men—gone as though they had never been, into dust of ages."

Her eyes flashed, and her young breasts heaved under their thin silk covering.

"But Sharra still lives! And Ethbaal too, if—"

She seemed abruptly to remember Blaine's presence, and turned. He

was staring stupefiedly at her. Now he found his voice, and clutched her smooth, bare shoulders in rising apprehension.

"Edith, are you out of your head? What does all this mean?"

Edith's wide, enigmatic eyes seemed to veil themselves as her heavy lids drooped lower.

"I—I have had strange dreams, Kenneth Blaine," she said slowly. "But I am all right now."

Blaine laughed shakily. "Good Lord, you frightened me half to death, Edith. I thought you were clear out of your mind."

He became suddenly aware that her warm, breathing body was close in his arm, and that she was making no effort to withdraw. Flushing, Blaine stepped back from her.

"Better go back to bed, Edith," he said strainedly. "You'll be all right now."

She studied him with that enigmatic, half-amused smile, then silently turned and re-entered the villa.

Blaine stared after her, a frown on his serious young face. He had never seen Edith act like that before. There had been something open and shameless about her looks and actions, something strange. And what had she meant by the queer words she had murmured as she gazed at the site below? Who were Sharra and Ethbaal?

It had been as though Edith were suddenly a stranger. And that thought brought a memory that swept Blaine's mind like a chilling wind. A memory of what she had told him that afternoon, of her queer dreams and what had seemed to happen in them.

Blaine stood, his clean-cut face

stiff with intense thought. The he laughed shortly. He was getting jumpy himself, he thought, to start imagining such things. He and Edith would have a good laugh over the whole thing at breakfast.

But in the sun-bright breakfast room the next morning, Blaine found Edith still—changed. When she entered in her simple white dress she looked more than ever like a youthful schoolgirl, and she greeted them quietly. Her father and Abel McPherson went on with their talk. But Kenneth Blaine watched the girl.

Edith was abnormally silent, listening without comment to the two senior archaeologists, watching them and Blaine and the servants with veiled eyes. She seemed even to inspect the food and silverware on the table as though she had never seen them before. She handled knife and fork hesitantly.

Blaine's vague fear increased. He could no longer doubt that Edith had undergone some deep mental change. Yet he told himself desperately that that incredible and monstrous suspicion that had come to him could surely have no basis, that the girl's change had some natural explanation.

John Kerr was speaking, pointing through the window to the green shore beyond the fruitless excavations.

"We'll start the new digging this side of the inner harbor," Kerr was saying. "I believe now that that's where the Temple of Moloch must have been located."

Edith spoke in a slow, drawling voice. "You are wrong," she told her father. "The Temple of Moloch lay west of the harbor. Dig beyond that

little mound, and you should find it."

They all stared at her. And her father's tone was crushing when he spoke.

"Are you venturing to give us directions? What in the devil do you know about ancient Carthage?"

"Nothing," she answered lightly. "It was just an idea."

But Blaine saw an amused flicker, a mocking gleam, in her half-veiled eyes. A queer chill ran through him.

And when he and Kerr and old McPherson had gone down the slope to where the Arab laborers were gathering, he spoke suddenly to Kerr.

"Let's start the digging in the place Edith pointed out, sir," Blaine suggested earnestly. "I believe there's a chance the Temple *was* there."

Kerr was amused. "You're so in love with my daughter that you're willing to follow up her wild guesses, eh?"

"Not that," Blaine answered, flushing. "It's just that it occurred to me that spot hadn't been touched by previous expeditions, and we might find something there."

"Maybe you're right," John Kerr said reflectively. "We might try it—it's all mostly guesswork here, anyway."

Abel McPherson sniffed scornfully. "If we're going to work by a lassie's whims, 'tis fine scientists we are."

Kenneth Blaine felt a strong inner tension as he helped Kerr and McPherson start the Arabs to digging beyond the little mound. He told himself that they would find nothing of the lost temple here, and that finding nothing would quiet the impossible and monstrous suspicion that kept haunting him. It would prove

that that wild idea of his about Edith's transformation was just nonsense.

The Arabs, in their lazy way, had dug for three hours when a group of them uttered shrill yells. Blaine and the two senior archaeologists went to them on the run. And Kerr yelled with excitement when he saw what they had uncovered.

It was only a broken wall of massive stone blocks, blackened and cracked by fire. But upon one of those blocks was carved a design of a grotesque, bull-headed human figure.

"Moloch!" yelled John Kerr. "By heaven, we've done it—we've hit the temple at last!"

He shouted to the staring Arabs. "Dig, you sons of perdition! Double pay for every man of you tonight!"

Then in the midst of his exultant excitement, John Kerr frowned wonderingly.

"Now how in the devil did Edith ever guess that this is the spot where the temple stood in old Carthage?"

Kenneth Blaine made no answer. Blaine was staring at the uncovered, age-old blocks, with a wild look on his face.

How had Edith known so certainly where that temple had stood in ancient Carthage? Could his dark and horrible suspicion about the girl be true?

Chapter II Priestess of Carthage

Everything at dinner that night seemed a little unreal, to Kenneth Blaine's strained mind. He was unable to join in the excited, exultant

talk of John Kerr and old McPherson about the newly-discovered temple and their plans to unearth it. He sat inwardly taut, unable to take his eyes from Edith.

The girl ate in demure silence. Seldom did she raise her eyes from the table. But Blaine could have sworn that several times when the senior archaeologists voiced confident speculations about the rites and customs in that temple of old Carthage, a mocking gleam of amusement appeared in Edith's eyes.

Neither her father nor the old Scotsman noticed her odd silence, engrossed as they were in the new discovery. But as the meal progressed, Blaine felt his tension grow unbearable. He told himself that he must lay at rest his appalling and incredible suspicion, that he was letting himself believe in weird fancies that could surely have no basis in reality.

He sought out Edith on the terrace after dinner, while the two older men pored over their scale-maps in the library.

The girl's slim little figure stood in the darkness with her back to him, gazing intently down at the dark excavations. She turned quickly at his approach, and greeted him with a slow smile.

"Edith, were you bothered last night by the dreams you told me of?" Blaine asked her earnestly.

The girl looked up surprisedly. "What dreams?"

Blaine stared. "Why, surely you remember—those nightmares you had, in which you felt that someone was trying to push your mind out of your body, and take possession of it."

Edith stiffened, and a queer flash

appeared in her eyes. But in a moment, she relaxed.

"I had forgotten I told you that, Kenneth Blaine," she answered. "No, the dreams do not trouble me any more. I do not think that they will ever trouble me again."

She laughed a little. And Blaine felt the trouble in his mind increasing, like a growing cloud.

The girl was looking down again at the black obscurity of the excavations.

"Strange, to think that of mighty Carthage there remains but a few blackened blocks of stone," she murmured. "That priests and priestesses, worshippers and rulers and slaves, are all gone like ghosts upon the wind."

Her small fists clenched. "I am glad that the Romans who pulled Carthage down were themselves pulled down in after ages! Yes, I wish I could have seen their city fall to a conqueror as Carthage did."

"Edith, you're talking wildly!" Blaine burst out. "You talk as though you were one of the old Carthaginians yourself."

The girl gave him that queer, mocking smile. "It is only that old Carthage seems so real here," she said. She turned away, and entered the villa.

Kenneth Blaine stared after her a little wildly. His head was spinning with crazy thoughts.

Such a thing as he suspected couldn't happen, he told himself. This was the twentieth century, and he was a scientist, not a credulous peasant. He must keep a grip on reality, and not let imagination run away with him.

But the astounding change in Edith—it was undeniable. She seemed a different person entirely. A person not entirely of this world—or time. And the dreams she had spoken of—

Blaine strode into the house. Edith had retired and so had old McPherson, but Doctor John Kerr was rolling up his maps.

He hailed Blaine genially. "My boy, this day's work will put all our names in archaeological history. When we finish uncovering that temple—"

"Doctor Kerr," Blaine interrupted, "have you noticed anything unusual about Edith today?"

Kerr stared. "Why, no. I've been too excited to pay much attention to her. She's not ill, is she?"

"I don't know," Blaine muttered, "but I think something's wrong with her, something queer. She's been strange, silent, all day. Like a different person."

Kerr was unworried. "She's just lonesome and homesick here, Kenneth. She'll snap out of it."

Blaine hesitated, on the verge of telling his senior all that was in his mind. But he could not get the words out. To utter such a crazy idea would be to make Kerr think that he had lost his wits.

In silence, he went slowly to his bedroom. The house grew still. Lying in the darkness, Blaine tried vainly to make common sense push his fantastic suspicions out of his mind. But as the hours dragged by, the incredible idea rooted deeper in his thoughts.

He heard his bedroom door open softly. Startled, Blaine snapped on the little battery-lamp on his night

table. As it cast a glow over his white-plastered room, he stared amazedly at his visitor.

It was Edith. She wore a loose silk negligee and her little feet were naked. Her pert, pretty face still wore the unfamiliar, brooding expression, and her blue eyes were fixed with enigmatic intensity on his face as she came to his bedside.

"Edith—good Lord!" Blaine exclaimed, sitting up in astonishment. "What are you doing here?"

"Are you so surprised that I come, Kenneth?" she asked calmly, sitting down on the bedside.

There was an amused mockery in her voice. Her eyes were dark, wide, unfathomable, as they fixed on his. Her red lips were indolently parted.

Blaine felt that chill wind as from an alien world sweep him again. Could this be the Edith Kerr he knew?

"You shouldn't be here, in my room at this hour, Edith," he said, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Why not, when we love each other, Kenneth Blaine?" she asked, half-innocently, half-mockingly.

Smiling, she bent forward. Her lips crushed his mouth in a slow, burning kiss that was the very essence of pagan passion.

Blaine's head reeled. He had kissed Edith before. But this was not Edith. This was—

"Someone else," he whispered hoarsely as she drew back her mocking face. "You're not Edith—you're someone else, in her body. I've suspected it all day."

"How can you think that, Kenneth Blaine?" she asked calmly. "Look into my eyes—you will see that I am still the girl you knew."

Blaine looked frozenly into her eyes. Wide, darkened eyes that were like windows into violet space, into abysses inconceivable. There were little lights spinning in those violet gulfs—little spinning lights—

His consciousness of his surroundings, of his own body, was fading. He was not aware any longer of himself or of the girl into whose eyes he was rigidly staring. He was aware only of those spinning lights that seemed to drug and fascinate his will.

"Hypnotism!" his subconscious shouted frantically to him. "You're being hypnotized—break free from this!"

He could not do it! He could not stir or speak. He was lost in violet abysses of space in which great forces roared like unearthly winds, and brilliant lights spun and flashed in a pattern that was strangely soothing and drugging.

Dimly, dimly, as though from remote gulfs far beyond the abysses in which he swam, he heard the voice of the girl. Only, he knew that it was no physical voice but a mental one that reached his mind.

"Yes, fool, I *am* a stranger in the body and brain of this girl!" that silver mental voice was crying. "I am Sharra of old Carthage—Sharra, high priestess of Tanit, who have flung my mind across the ages and seized this girl's body, to escape my doomed city!"

"You modern men who know so much—this thing you do *not* know fully—this power of the human mind to travel in time into past or future. For the conscious mind is but an immaterial webwork of electric force, residing in the brain. And when the ancient secret is known that im-

material consciousness can be flung back or forward at will and can force exchange of bodies with other minds in the distant ages it reaches!

"I, Sharra of Carthage, know that ancient secret. So I was able to hurl my conscious mind forward into the future, and to force this girl's mind from her body so that I could take possession of it! To force her consciousness back into the discarded body which I left in doomed Carthage!

"Now I have her body and brain, her subconscious memories and knowledge, but *my* mind and personality rule them. Thus have I escaped the doomed city which the Romans were about to destroy. And when I have helped my lover, the suffete Ethbaal, to escape likewise into *your* body, then our triumph over time and doom will be complete!"

Kenneth Blaine heard that exultant mental cry as though from remotest distances, through the roaring violet haze in which he seemed to be floating.

And Blaine knew—horror! Horror that the thing he had suspected had happened to Edith, and was about to happen to himself. An incredible theft of bodies across time!

"Ethbaal!" the silvery mental cry of Sharra was echoing through the roaring violet abyss. "Ethbaal, the man's body is ready! Come quickly!"

And Blaine seemed to hear another and different mental cry, fainter and farther but growing rapidly louder.

"I come, Sharra! Help me to force him completely from his body!"

Blaine felt an impact of terrific mental force upon his darkened consciousness. He felt a rending, tear-

ing sensation that was not physical but psychic.

He knew dimly that he, his real personality, the non-material electrical complex of his conscious mind, was being forced out of his brain and body. Frantically, he struggled with his will against the force.

"The man resists, Sharra!" stabbed Ethbaal's fearful, angry mental cry. "Help me!"

Full force of the two minds of Ethbaal and Sharra crushed against Kenneth Blaine's consciousness. And suddenly he felt a tremendous shock, a giddy rush through dimensionless, unguessable spaces—and then blackness.

Out of that blackness, Blaine came slowly back to consciousness. He was no longer in the hazy abysses, and the mental forces attacking him had ceased. He could feel his body again, and the soft surface on which he lay.

A tremendous wave of relief surged through Blaine. He shuddered with the reaction from the hideous peril that had threatened him.

"Thank God!" he muttered, "I've escaped from—"

He opened his eyes. And his lips froze, his body went rigid, as he stared in uncomprehending amazement.

He was not in his bedroom in the villa. He was lying in a barbaric chamber with black marble walls, upon whose alabaster ceiling sprawled the black coils of a huge painted serpent. The closed door was guarded by two monstrous, silver, fish-headed idols. Through the open, unglazed windows poured a blazing flood of hot *midday* sunlight.

Blaine staggered stupefiedly to his feet from the copper couch on which

he had been lying. He looked down amazedly at his strange costume. He wore a brass breastplate over a linen kirtle, high brazen greaves on his legs, purple leather boots on his feet. A short curved sword and dagger hung at his belt, and a crested helmet lay nearby. And Blaine felt that his body was much *bigger*.

Wildly, he looked around the barbaric room. His eyes riveted upon a polished copper mirror on the wall. He stared into it, and he felt his brain rock to the shock of what he saw.

It was not his own face, not Kenneth Blaine's serious, clean-cut face, that looked back at him. It was a dark, aquiline, cruel-eyed face with a short curled black beard masking harsh lips, that stared back from the copper mirror. He was in another man's body!

"Ethbaal!" he choked wildly to himself. "Ethbaal, the suffete of old Carthage—Sharra helped him force my mind to exchange bodies across the ages—"

Blaine staggered to the open windows. He looked forth upon a scene that sent his reason tottering.

Ancient Carthage—the Carthage of a century and a half before Christ—lay in the blazing sunlight before him!

Blain was looking down on the monster metropolis from a room in the massive Citadel that crowned its highest point, the Byrsa hill. From the brutal, square black mass of the Citadel, guarded by tall cypresses, the city sloped to north and east and west, a vast mass of flat-roofed buildings of white stone and plaster, crowded along narrow streets and bounded by a mighty triple wall

that was studded with crenellated guard-towers. Beyond the round Cothon, or military harbor, crowded with anchored war-galleys, lay the outer harbor and its defensive mole and the blue sheet of the gulf.

The Carthage of the past, the Carthage of history—stretching before Kenneth Blaine's stupefied gaze! And he saw that it was Carthage at war, defending itself. Soldiers on the walls were using bows and javelins and catapults to repel the attacks of disciplined masses of Roman troops who advanced again and again to attack the walls. The whir of catapults and crash of huge stones and whizz of arrows rose even above the babel of cries from the fearful, motley crowds that choked the narrow streets.

"Good God!" Blaine cried hoarsely. "I'm trapped here in old Carthage, two thousand years in the past—in another man's body!"

Chapter III In Tanit's Temple

Blaine felt himself tottering on the verge of madness. This incredible thing *couldn't* have happened! It was surely only a crazy dream.

Yet he knew with inexorable certainty that it was no dream, that it was reality. He, Kenneth Blaine of twentieth century America, had by some hell's magic of ancient mental science had been catapulted into the body of a man of ancient Carthage. Into the body of Ethbaal one of two suffetes or elected kings of this barbaric city of antiquity.

Those Roman legions besieging the walls out there—that use of a forgotten sorcery of science to fling their minds across the ages into new

bodies, had forced exchange of bodies. They wanted to escape Carthage before the Romans conquered it and destroyed it and its people.

"I've got to get back!" Blaine told himself desperately. "I've got to get back to my own body, my own time!"

And then a new thought flashed through his chaotically seething mind like lightning lancing through storm.

"Edith! She—her mind—is somewhere here in the body of the high priestess Sharra!"

There was a sudden loud and frantic knocking at the door of the black marble chamber. Blaine spun around, startled.

"Ethbaal!" a woman's voice was crying from outside the door. "What has happened to you? Let me in!"

The woman's cry was in a strange, harsh language, the ancient Punic tongue. Yet Blaine understood her.

He understood her, and he recognized her voice. It was Lanash, his wife—or, rather, the wife of Ethbaal.

Blaine reeled in the face of this new mystery. How could he, Kenneth Blaine, understand that language and know these things?

Then he dimly comprehended. It was his *conscious mind* that had been forcibly transferred, that now inhabited the brain and body of the suffete Ethbaal. But there had been no transfer of the *subconsciousness*, which lay physically recorded in the brain-cells. So that he now possessed, along with Ethbaal's body, the Carthaginian's subconscious memories and knowledge.

He went to the door and slid back the silver bolt with unsteady fingers. The woman entered with a rush.

"Ethbaal!" she cried fearfully, gripping his arms and looking up at him. "What is wrong? There is fighting at the lower harbor wall—the Romans are attacking strongly, and your soldiers are calling for you!"

Lanash, woman of Carthage who was—his wife! Or at least, the wife of the man whose body he now wore.

She was dark and beautiful and dangerous-looking as a panther. Her black hair was piled high, and she wore a long red simarre or gown embroidered with black serpents, and confined by a dark leather girdle studded with brilliant gems. Her heavily-jewelled arms were bare to the shoulder.

Her midnight-black eyes flashed yellow with alarm and suspicion as she looked up into Blaine's face. Bewildered as he was, his senses reeled from the strong perfume of musk and nard that rose from this barbaric beauty.

"Ethbaal, what means it that you lock yourself away like this?" Lanash cried again. The suspicion flared stronger in her eyes as she added. "Have you been plotting something with that accursed wench of Tanit—Sharra?"

"Sharra?" Blaine repeated numbly, only dimly aware that he was subconsciously speaking in the harsh Punic. "What makes you think of her?"

Jealousy flashed hot in Lanash's eyes. "I know that temple wench! She still loves you and seeks to take you from me!" she cried. "Aye, and it has seemed to me, my husband, that you have returned her soft looks.

"I would kill you myself, Ethbaal,

before I would let *her* have you!" she cried furiously. "Yes, even now when the Romans batter at our gates and Carthage rocks toward its doom, I will not let Sharra take you!"

Blaine tried to steady his spinning mind. This was no dream—this was reality—he was in the body of Ethbaal, and he must play the part of Ethbaal until he could find some scheme to get Edith and himself back to their own bodies, their own age.

"Be silent, Lanash," he said unsteadily in the Punic. "Sharra means nothing to me. I must go, now, to the wall where the Romans attack."

"Your chariot is waiting," Lanash said, her rage fading. Abruptly she wound hot arms around his neck, clinging to him. "Be careful in the fighting, Ethbaal! But a few days of life may remain to us, since soon the accursed spawn of Rome may break in upon us. Be not too rash, lest we lose even these last few days!"

He put Lanash aside, and moved haltingly out of the room into a dusky black marble corridor.

Blaine's numbed, dazed mind held room for but one objective. He must go to Sharra—to Sharra, the high priestess of Tanit whose body must now hold Edith's mind.

He strode unsteadily down the corridor. Grayfaced priests in flowing purple robes, fearful-looking, obese aristocrats, half-naked Greek and Nubian slaves, bowed to him as he passed.

As he emerged from the Citadel onto the broad stone terrace on its northern front, a rank of brazen Carthaginian guards lifted their heavy spears in salute to him.

"The chariot of Ethbaal!" shouted a captain.

The chariot, drawn by four black horses and driven by a giant, swarthy Numidian, came with a rush of trampling hoofs and rumbling wheels across the terrace.

Blaine stepped in and ordered: "To the Temple of Tanit!"

The Numidian looked amazed. He faltered, "But master—the fighting at the lower harbor wall—"

"You heard me!" snapped Baline. "To Tanit's temple, and quickly!"

Scaredly, the charioteer turned and sent his long thonged lash cracking above the horses. The heavy chariot leaped forward with a creaking rush.

It raced down one of the crooked, cobbled and narrow streets that led from the Byrsa, or hill on which the Citadel dominated the city. Blaine saw men and women and children leaping hastily aside to avoid the reckless rush of his vehicle.

In the crowded streets, Blaine glimpsed not only dark Carthaginian men and women in long robes, but also a motley horde from many other races. Negro warriors in lion skins, white Greeks with great bronze Nician shields, hook-nosed Phoenicia seamen, Egyptian slaves—all the races that peopled the dying Carthaginian empire.

They shouted wildly, raising hands in supplication to Blaine as his chariot rushed past them.

"Save us, o master!" they pleaded. "Save us from the Romans!"

Still others were silent in despair, and mothers were weeping as they held their infants close. A burning-

eyed priest in a dead-black robe was yelling warnings of imminent doom.

"The great god Moloch is wroth that our sacrifices to him have not been greater!" he was crying. "Moloch must be appeased with more offerings, or we shall be conquered and destroyed."

Sacrifices to Moloch? Blaine shuddered, as he heard. He knew what that meant. The sacrifices to that most hideous god that had ever been worshipped on earth had been living children that were fed to the idol's fires.

Carthage, feeling itself doomed by the Roman siege, was resorting to dread holocausts of sacrifices to placate Moloch and save itself.

"Moloch will save us, if our offerings are great enough!" he heard the priest still shouting behind him.

Blaine felt, even in the chaos of his crazy thoughts, a flash of pity. These people were doomed—no worship of their gods would save them. For he, Kenneth Blaine, knew what the course of history must be—knew that the Romans would conquer this place and put all its people to death and destroy it forever.

And—the thought crashed home—he and Edith would die here with the rest when the Romans broke in! Trapped in the bodies of Sharra and Ethbaal, they would meet death like these others, unless they found some way to get back to their own bodies and time.

What way was there? The question howled hopelessly in Blaine's mind as the chariot rushed on with him through the teeming, fear-ridden, barbaric city. How could he, who knew nothing of the diabolical se-

cret science Sharra had used to effect this incredible transposition of minds across the ages, hope to undo what she had done?

The chariot drew up before a vast enclosure, a great grove of huge plane trees surrounded by a low wall. Through the dense green foliage loomed the domed mass of a yellow marble structure that Blaine subconsciously recognized as the Temple of Tanit, the Carthaginian goddess of love. He leaped out of the chariot and strode through the open gate of the enclosure.

Blaine felt his mind rock again to the wonder of the experience, as in the body of Ethbaal, he strode along the paths of white marble-dust that wound toward the temple through the dense sacred groves. In these murmurous precincts the babel of the city could not be heard, and Tanit's worshippers were thronging unheeding of the fighting going on at the city's distant walls.

The green, shadowy groves held many hundreds of people. Everywhere were the priestesses of Tanit, girls in transparent gowns of violet gauze who wore Tanit's sacred symbol upon their half-naked breasts. And with them were men, soldiers of Carthage from many races, and citizens and merchants—all of them too accustomed to the siege to let the fighting keep them from this place.

Blaine entered a long portico of phallic statues, amid which the white doves of Tanit flashed like streaks of light. He stepped from this directly into a great hall where troops of chanting priest-girls held smoking censers of suffocating in-

cense before the huge, bland-faced idol of many-breasted Tanit.

To a priestess who approached him with a low reverence, Blaine spoke sharply, "Take me to the high priestess Sharra, at once."

The girl's antimony-painted eyes widened, and she seemed distressed.

"The high priestess is not—herself, master," she faltered. "She is stricken by the goddess—her mind wanders."

"Nevertheless, take me to her," Blaine insisted harshly.

The girl bowed lower before his command. "Follow me, lord Ethbaal."

She led the way up an unrailed stair of stone that climbed the side of the vast hall. In a cedar-walled corridor on the upper level, she opened a door blazoned with gold figures of Tanit.

Blaine stepped into a silk-hung chamber set about with small statuettes of the goddess. As he entered, a woman who had lain weeping on black cushions, sprang up fearfully.

She faced him, a quivering, terrified figure. Blaine stared into her face, unable to speak. He knew that she was Sharra, the high priestess—but only Sharra's body.

She was quite tall. Her high-piled black hair made her look taller. The tight white silk bodice, slashed between the breasts, and the temple-skirt she wore molded a slim-waisted, voluptuously rounded figure. Upon her wrists were heavy bracelets of gold and emeralds, and large pearls adorned the bare, rosy toes that protruded from her open sandals of soft blue leather.

Her face was long and dark and exotically lovely, with a heavy, languorous-drooping red mouth and black-eyes whose lids were darkened with kohl. This woman, to Blaine's first glance, was the very embodiment of barbaric, pagan beauty.

Then as he saw the quivering of her limbs, the tremble of her moist red lips and the horror and fear that lay deep within her eyes, he took a quick step forward.

"Edith!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Is it you, Edith?"

For a moment, the woman stared at him in utter frozen disbelief.

"You—you are Ethbaal," she whispered in the Punic. "I know that, somehow—but how can you know who I *really* am?"

"Edith, it's me—Ken Blaine!" he cried. "In Ethbaal's body, yes—but Blaine, nevertheless. The same thing happened to me as to you—"

Next moment, she swayed forward into his arms and clung to him in an agony of sobbing.

As he held her, with her musk-drugged black hair crushing his cheek, Blaine felt an uncontrollable chill. This was all so incredible! He and Edith, here in each other's arms—yet not in their own bodies but in two utterly strange bodies in this utterly strange city of the past.

And—the thought shook him—the real Sharra and Ethbaal possessed *their* bodies, back in their own life far across the abyss of time.

"Ken—Ken—," she was sobbing. "I've been half-mad since I woke up—in this body, here in this ghastly place."

She looked up at him, her dark,

exotic eyes swimming with tears.

"Ken, this is all a dream, a nightmare, isn't it? It must be! It can't be real!"

"It's real, Edith," he said as steadily as he could, his arms tightening around her quivering, naked shoulders. "We've been forced back across time, into these bodies, by Sharra and Ethbaal. Unbelievable—but true!"

"But how could it happen?" she asked tearfully. "How could anything cross time?"

"No thing could cross time, Edith," he said. "But the conscious mind—the immaterial complex of electricity that is our real personalities—is not a thing, is non-material. It can apparently be projected at will across the time-dimension into past or future, by one who knows the secret.

"Sharra knows the secret. God knows how—but there have been many legends that peoples of the past learned much of mental powers. Powers which we moderns, in our concentration upon physical and material science, never have learned. Our psychologists, such as Dunne with his projection of the mind into the future in dreams and Rhine with his discovery of extra-sensory powers, are just beginning to discover astounding things about the mind which were known to some few people for ages in the past.

"Sharra had the secret knowledge and power," Blaine went on, "and she used it—to project her mind across time into your body, forcing your own mind back into her body. And then she helped Ethbaal do the

same thing to me. So that they could escape from Carthage before the Romans destroyed it and its people."

"But we can't stay here—in these bodies, this horrible city and time!" she cried. Her dark, lovely face was pallid. "I nearly went mad when I awoke here in this woman's body. There was no warning—in my sleep I felt again that dream of someone trying to force my mind out of my body, and then there was a shock and I woke here.

"And the things I've seen here!" She covered her face with her jewelled, painted hands. "Cruelty and horror unimaginable, people frantic with fear that the Romans will break in, horrible rites—"

"I know, Edith," he husked, tightening his arms around her. "But don't despair—we'll get back somehow to our own bodies and time—"

"How can we?" she cried wildly. "We're imprisoned here in these bodies and we don't know the secret power they used to bring this about. And when the Romans conquer the city, as you and I know they will, we die like everyone else here and—"

The door of the silken chamber of the high priestess burst suddenly open. Blaine whirled.

It was Lanash who entered. Wife of Ethbaal—of himself! Her midnight eyes were raging yellow hell-fires of jealousy and hate as she looked at the woman in Blaine's arms.

"I knew it would be so!" she cried ragingly. "I knew, my husband, that you were not going to the fighting by the harbor wall, but to visit your paramour here!"

She rushed forward, and a silver dagger flashed in her hand, striking at the naked breast of Sharra-Edith.

"Death for you, Sharra!" she panted as she struck with the knife.

Chapter IV. The Jealousy of Lanash

Blaine plunged and caught the wrist of Lanash just as the silver dagger in her hand was touching Sharra's breast.

He twisted Lanash's wrist roughly, and the little weapon clattered to the floor. But the woman struggled in his grasp like a wildcat, seeking to get free to throw herself upon the priestess.

"Wench of Tanit!" she raged. "I knew that you sought to theft my husband from me. And now I find him here in your arms."

"Lanash, be silent!" Blaine exclaimed, seeking to quiet the furiously struggling woman.

"Be silent, when you leave me for this woman?" Lanash cried, her eyes pure yellow with passion. "Do you think you can cast me aside like a Malquan dancing-girl? I am a daughter of the house of Barca—and your wife!"

Blaine groaned inwardly. How could he quiet this tigress of a woman? He could not tell her the truth, that he was a stranger in Ethbaal's body even as Edith was in Sharra's, for she would never believe such an incredible assertion.

Sharra-Edith stood bewildered, still stupefied by the sudden furious attack, staring with wide, black eyes at the raging woman whom Blaine held.

Abruptly through the open door came running two Carthaginian officers. Both were covered with blood, their armor battered, and the foremost, a tall, brawny soldier, was gasping for breath as he ran toward Blaine.

"Lord Ethbaal, the Romans have breached the walls by the lower harbor!" he cried. "Come quickly, or our men will give way!"

Blaine stood irresolute, still holding the raging Lanash. Subconsciously he had recognized the two officers, and knew this brawny officer was Mago, one of his captains in the army of Carthage.

"Go and bid the men stand fast, Mago," he ordered. "I'll come presently."

"You'll come now or the Hundred will have you crucified as a traitor to Carthage!" cried Mago. "It's your duty as master—why do you linger here with these women?"

"Don't go!" exclaimed Sharra-Edith fearfully to Blaine. "Don't leave me in this place!"

"If you delay longer," Mago said furiously, "you'll be on a cross within an hour—and this priestess with you!"

"I've got to go," Blaine told her desperately. "It's death for us both if I don't."

He swung to the panting officer behind Mago.

"Guard the door of the priestess Sharra's chambers while I'm gone," he ordered. "Let no one enter—especially my wife."

Lanash was white with rage. "So, my husband, you admit openly to Carthage that you cleave to this temple girl instead of me? I'll avenge

this insult, Ethbaal! I'll kill this priestess whose magic had made you forsake me!"

Unheeding her raving threats, Blaine pushed her out the door. The young officer prevented her from re-entering, standing guard with drawn sword.

The brawny Mago was tugging at Blaine's arm.

"Quick, lord Ethbaal!"

Blaine called back, "I'll be back soon, Edith, and we'll find some way out of this devil's trap."

Then he and Mago hurried down through the temple, leaving Lanash in the corridor above, raving appallingly threats after him, insane with jealousy and wounded pride.

They rushed out to the blazing sunset-lit street where Blaine's chariot waited. He and Mago sprang into it, and he yelled to the Numidian driver:

"To the harbor! Quick!"

The Numidian's whip cracked and the horses leaped forward, with rumble of wheels and rush of ringing hoofs. Blaine's mind was a wild riot of emotions. He, Kenneth Blaine, hurrying to lead the Carthaginian defenders against the attacking hosts of Rome!

But he had to do it. If he didn't, if he failed in the duty that was Ethbaal's, he would be instantly executed as a traitor by the Hundred, the senate of Carthage. He, Kenneth Blaine, would die here in Ethbaal's body.

The chariot rushed recklessly through the sloping streets of the squalid lower town, toward the harbors. Men and women, children and slaves and wounded soldiers, were

seething fearfully through the streets away from the walls. Clearly audible was the din and clash of battle from the wall where the attack had pierced.

Blaine's chariot rushed through the throngs and rattled around the circular Cothon or military harbor. The great inner wall of Carthage, towering fifty feet in the sunlight, loomed ahead. Upon its top, Carthaginian warriors were hurling javelins, arrows, great stones and ladies of boiling pitch upon the Romans outside.

"There is the breach!" Mago yelled over the din. "And see—our men give way!"

Blaine saw, ahead, the narrow crack in the walls which had been made by the Roman battering-rams.

Inside that crevasse were massed a horde of Carthaginian soldiery, fighting desperately with sword and spear to hold back the solid, disciplined masses of swarthy Romans who were forcing through the opening.

The battering-rams of the Romans were still crashing away outside, to widen the breach. Their deafening thunder, and the whizz of arrows and javelins, and clash of swords and shrill battle-cries and death-yells, filled the air.

"The lord Ethbaal comes!" yelled some of the Carthaginian soldiers as the chariot rattled up. "Courage, comrades—the master is here!"

As Blaine leaped from the chariot, Mago pointed excitedly along the inside of the wall to a dozen great, gray swaying beasts tethered not far away—some of the Carthaginian war-elephants.

"If we can push the Romans back outside the wall, we can use the elephants to disperse them!" Mago shouted. "I've given the order—but first we must force the Romans out."

The brawny Carthaginian captain had drawn his sword, and Blaine jerked out his own curved, unfamiliar weapon. They ran forward into the battle at the breach, Blaine mechanically keeping beside the big captain.

"The master is here to lead us!" shouted the blood-covered, struggling Carthaginians. "Forward, comrades!"

"Charge them!" Blaine shouted. "Drive them back out!"

The Carthaginians surged forward with a fierce yell. The movement of their mass pushed Blaine



and Mago into the forefront of the desperate fight.

Blaine had no time to think of the strangeness of his position. Hard, swarthy Roman faces and stabbing Roman swords and spears swirled in front of him. Blaine hacked out with his sword and was dimly amazed to find that he could handle it expertly, with all of Ethbaal's subconscious skill in swordsmanship.

He stabbed below the armor of one Roman, then swiftly sliced at the neck of another. He felt a spearpoint graze his arm, but paid it no heed in the heat of this desperate fight. He almost forgot that he *was* Kenneth Blaine—he was momentarily only another battle-mad Carthaginian, like yelling Mago and the others.

The Romans gave way before the terrific assault and were slowly pushed back through the narrow breach into the open marshy land outside the walls. Across the marsh, whose scattered pools gleamed blood-red in the smoldering sunset, distant Roman masses of reinforcements were coming on the run. On either side loomed the huge timber battering-rams.

"Now—the elephants!" Mago's great voice yelled back through the wild turmoil, as they pushed the Romans forth.

"Stand clear!" Blaine shouted to the men around him, as the ground under them quivered. "The elephants come!"

Through the breach behind them, the huge beasts were coming in single file at a ground-rocking run. Blaine and Mago and their Carthaginians hastily leaped to the right and left, and the elephants rushed

past them upon the mass of Romans facing them.

Trumpeting shrilly and horribly with upraised trunks, their iron-shod tusks gleaming in the dying sunset, they thundered into the Romans. Tusks and trunks caught and tossed the soldiers, huge feet trampled them, and the riders of the great beasts hurled their javelins down to add to the slaughter.

With cries of terror, the Romans broke and fled back from the fearful war-beasts.

"Now fire the battering-rams!" yelled Mago, as the Carthaginians uttered a fierce, triumphant cry.

"Hurry—the Roman reinforcements are coming!" Blaine shouted.

The *buccinas* or war-trumpets of the approaching Roman reinforcements were bellowing louder and closer out of the dusk-veiled marshland. Torches flared in the darkening dusk as the Carthaginians rushed toward the great rams. Their timbers flared up suddenly with a crackling roar, the leaping red flames throwing a quivering light out over the wild faces of Blaine's followers.

"Back into the city, men!" he shouted.

The Carthaginians obeyed, streaming hastily back through the break in the wall, and then laboring frenziedly under Mago's loud orders to close the breach.

Stones and timbers were rushed forward and flung into the breach. Rapidly the crack closed up. By the time the Roman reinforcements reached the outer side of the wall, the breach had been rudely repaired, and the Carthaginians were ready atop the wall to greet them with showers of arrows and javelins.

"We've held them!" exclaimed Mago. "But another such breach and they'll take the city. We can't keep them out forever."

Blaine, gasping, was wiping his sweat-dripping face when a hand tugged his arm and a girl's frantic voice sounded. "Lord Ethbaal!"

He swung around. It was a scared-faced girl in a gauzy gown whom he recognized as one of the priestesses of Tanit.

"The high priestess Sharra—," she panted above the din of fighting from the wall-top.

Blaine's brain took instant alarm, and he cried to her with fierce apprehension:

"Has anything happened to Sharra?"

"Soldiers and priests have come to the temple to seize her!" babbled the terrified girl. "The officer whom you left to guard her is trying to hold them off—I came to warn you—"

Blaine's heart went icy from the unexpected shock. Sharra—Edith—in danger!

He spun around and yelled through the darkness to his charioteer. The Numidian drove the vehicle up rapidly, the horses snorting and rolling their eyes wildly in the torchlight as they scented the blood on the dead bodies nearby.

Mago grasped Blaine's arm. "You can't leave the wall now when the Romans threaten another attack, Ethbaal!"

"I'm going!" Blaine cried fiercely, shaking loose the brawny captain's grip. And he cried to the Numidian, "To the temple of Tanit—and hurry!"

The chariot rushed through the darkness. Night was complete now,

and the vast, black mass of Carthage loomed like an enormous thundercloud over Blaine as his chariot rattled furiously up the steep and narrow streets.

His mind was in an agony of apprehension for Edith. He could not guess who they were who had come to seize her but his fears were black and boundless. He was hardly aware of the dim crackle of fighting around the distant walls, or the crowds in the streets through which he passed.

Haggard, fear-wild men and women were streaming through all streets in torchlit throngs, all heading toward the west end of the metropolis. Blaine heard one name from all lips.

"Moloch!"

The Numidian charioteer turned a fearful face.

"I cannot go faster, master! The streets are full of the people who go to Moloch's temple for tonight's sacrifices!"

"Drive right through them!" Blaine shouted, his voice raw and wild.

The thronging, torchlight worshipers streaming toward the temple of Moloch recoiled in new alarm as the chariot of their lord thundered through the streets past them.

The chariot rushed up to the dark temple of Tanit, and Blaine leaped out. He had his bloody sword in his hand as he ran into the temple enclosure.

The torchlit interior of the temple was almost deserted. A few priestesses were huddling fearfully in a corner, some of them weeping.

Blaine sprang up the stairs to the cedar-walled corridor where he had left the young officer to guard Shar-

ra's door. The officer, his face pale and his hand clutching a sword-wound below his shoulder, was staggering toward him.

"Sharra!" Blaine yelled. "Where is she?"

"They took her away," the wounded man gasped. "I tried to stop them, as you ordered, but they struck me down, and the priests of Moloch took her."

"Moloch!" Blaine reeled from the stunning shock of that dreadful name. "The priests of Moloch took Sharra?"

"Yes, lord—for sacrifice in tonight's rites!" the wounded man panted. "They said that only the offering of Tanit's own priestess could appease Moloch now and save our doomed city."

Blaine staggered, his heart seemed to stop beating. Edith—in Sharra's body—to be sacrificed this night to Moloch, dreadful, fiery idol, greatest god of Carthage! Edith, dying in Sharra's body, in that hideous way—

A woman's voice hissed beside him. "I told you I would have vengeance on that temple wench, Ethbaal!"

Blaine turned dazedly. It was Lanash who stood beside him, her beautiful face contorted with satisfied hate.

"You had Sharra seized as a sacrifice to Moloch!" he yelled wildly.

"Yes, I did it!" she flashed, venomous as a serpent. "I told the priests and people that Moloch was not satisfied with the sacrifice of children alone, that he wanted a bride also—that Tanit must be his bride, in the person of her high priestess, and

that that alone would save doomed Carthage.

"You cannot save your lady love now, Ethbaal! The priests and the people would tear you to bits if you tried to halt the sacrifice. In an hour from now, Sharra passes into the waiting arms of Moloch!"

Chapter V Bride of Moloch

The tawny flames of satisfied hate in Lanash' black eyes, the passionate triumph in her dark face, maddened Blaine.

He seized her throat with his hands, in wild urge to crush out the life of this woman whose jealousy had sentenced Edith to the most horrible of deaths.

"Kill me, my husband," jeered Lanash unfrightenedly. "Death is close for all in Carthage anyway, and I die happy knowing that Sharra has not escaped my vengeance."

"You fool, Sharra has escaped you, and so has Ethbaal!" Blaine hissed ragingly. "Sharra is already safe, in the body of a girl two thousand years from now, and so is Ethbaal safe in my body in that same time. And that innocent girl wears Sharra's body, and I wear your husband's body!"

Blaine spoke only in the raging passion of his fear and horror. He did not expect for a moment that Lanash would credit the thing he told her.

But Lanash paled terribly, as she heard. She stared wildly into his face, trembling in every fiber.

"I thought there was something strange about you this day!" she cried suddenly. "Then it is true—the

minds of Sharra and my husband Ethbaal have escaped into the future—”

A wild and terrible anger flared in her beautiful face. She raised her quivering arms in an imprecatory gesture.

“Curse Sharra—curse her, all ye gods! She has used an ancient secret to flee with my husband from this doomed city, and she and he are safe to live and love while I must die here!”

Blaine was startled out of his wild wrath by the passionate cry of Lanash. He slowly released his hold on her.

“Lanash, you believe then?” he exclaimed. “You know of this secret power of hurling the mind into new bodies across time?”

“Aye, I know,” she said fiercely, “for I learned it of the same wise man from whom accursed Sharra learned it. That secret knowledge has been passed down by a few in every race from age to age, from ancient Egypt to Babylon and Tyre. Few who knew it have ever dared to risk using it, so perilous is it, but now Sharra has used it to flee into far years with my husband. Why did I not kill her before she could do it?”

Blaine gripped her bare arms. “Lanash, if you know that secret, then you can help the girl and myself undo what has been done, to get back to our own bodies in our own time?”

The raving Lanash stiffened at that suggestion. A fire of terrible hope sprang suddenly into her black eyes.

“If I could do that!” she hissed with volcanic passion. “If I could

only force Sharra and my traitor husband back into their own bodies here, to meet the doom they sought to flee—”

“Will you try it, Lanash?” Blaine asked, wild hope springing up in him.

Lanash’ passion-ridden eyes narrowed, and her nostrils dilated.

“Sharra—her body—is a prisoner of Moloch’s priests now,” she said tensely, half to herself. “She dies a sacrifice within the hour—gods, why did I not know the truth before I incited them to take her as an offering!”

She added tautly, “But if the priests will allow us to be with her before the sacrifice takes place, I might be able to do the thing, to send her and you back—to force the two guilty fugitives to return—”

“Come on, then—there’s no time to lose!” Blaine cried, his nerves quivering.

Lanash hastened with him past the wounded officer who had sunk insensible. In the torchlit temple hall below, great Tanit’s idol still smiled placidly forth upon the few scared priestesses who huddled in the shadowy corners.

Blaine and the woman hastened out into the starlit night, through the dark sacred groves to the cobbled street where his chariot waited. Lanash sprang up into it with him.

“To the Temple of Moloch—the rear entrance!” she cried. “Drive fast, Idril!”

As they started, Blaine heard from the outer walls the dull, monotonous thunder of the Roman rams battering the wall anew, and the yelling of the Carthaginian defenders.

“It may be that this is the last night of Carthage!” Lanash cried

over the clatter of hoofs. "But if so, Sharra and my treacherous husband shall meet death here in their own bodies with me, if my art can force them back."

"Faster, Idrid!" she called a moment later to the crouching charioteer. "I hear already the chanting of Moloch's worshipers!"

Blaine could hear it too, from the western end of the black, enormous city—a dim, solemn chanting of many thousands of voices that slowly rose and fell, and that chilled his blood.

Through nighted Carthage the chariot raced, toward the west where a red glow of torches quivered against the sky. Now they were so near that the loud, deep, solemn chanting drowned out the dull and distant thunder of the Roman rams.

Blaine made out the Temple of Moloch, looming massive and black and ominous against the stars, a cubical mass of stone crowned by a pyramidal tower and facing a huge circular plaza. He saw that the plaza was crowded with a tight-packed throng of tens of thousands of men and women, their pallid faces turned in the torchlight toward the frowning facade of the temple as they chanted.

The charioteer skirted the plaza and drove around into the deep shadow of a narrow alley behind the enormous temple. Lanash leaped out and led the way along the side of the vast edifice.

"Seel!" she cried, pointing toward the plaza. "Already they bring Moloch forth for the sacrifices!"

Blaine, staring, felt his blood go cold. Amid solemn chanting and

clash of cymbals and blare of horns, a gigantic figure was moving slowly out of the temple's immense doors onto the plaza.

It was a fifty-foot brazen statue of a grotesque, bestial figure—a colossal, sitting man with a bull's head, his giant brass arms outstretched from his breast, in which yawned a square opening.

"Moloch! Baal Ammon!" the Carthagian crowd was shrieking now as the chant ceased. "Save us, great lord, from the doom that threatens us!"

Blaine glimpsed priests busy at the bottom of the giant brazen figure. He saw flames shoot up inside it as the store of combustible material in its hollow interior was fired.

His senses shook at that hideous sight. Great Moloch, sitting in giant majesty, fire shooting from his eyes and the opening in his breast, his huge arms outstretched for the sacrifices.

"Come!" Lanash was exclaiming, tugging at his wrist. "There is little time left us."

She pulled him through a doorway, down a dark stone corridor and into a vast, shadowy stone hall whose overpowering gloom was hardly lightened by flaring torches.

Black-robed priests were here in numbers, most of them excitedly hurrying out to help tend the god. Others were gathered around a group of several scores of small children, who were dressed in pure white robes and were looking scaredly about and whimpering.

"There is the high priest of the god!" cried Lanash. She sprang forward, Blaine stumbling after her.

The high priest of Moloch was a terrifying figure, wearing a tall copper headdress like the bull's head of his idol, his black gown worked with silver designs of the god. His thin, bearded face was fanatic, his eyes flashing half insanely.

"The suffete Ethbaal and his wife!" he exclaimed when he saw Lanash and her companion. "What do you here?"

"We must see Tanit's priestess before she is sacrificed," Lanash told him swiftly.

The high priest recoiled. "No! She is sacred now to the god whose bride she soon becomes. No man can approach Moloch's bride now save we, his priests, or Moloch will not be moved to save our city from the enemy."

"You'll let us see her or I'll call back my troops from the walls and let the Romans enter the city now!" Blaine threatened fiercely.

"You think to rescue her from her fate!" the high priest accused him passionately. "It is well known, lord Ethbaal, that you have long secretly loved this Sharra."

"We do not dream of rescuing her!" Lanash told him vehemently. "Would I, who encouraged you to choose her as Moloch's bride, attempt now to save her? And can you not post your guards outside the door of her cell while we see her, to make sure?"

The high priest's lips compressed. "I will do that," he rasped. "And I shall order my men to slay you both without hesitation if you attempt to take Moloch's bride out of her cell."

He called a priest and gave harsh, quick orders. A horde of the priests,

scowling fanatically at Blaine, surrounded him and Lanash and took them out of the shadowy hall into a neighboring corridor. They opened a barred door. Blaine and Lanash entered a dimly torchlit cell, and instantly the door outside was barred and they heard the armed priests station themselves around it.

Sharra-Edith rose from the bench upon which she had lain sobbing and flung herself into Blaine's arms.

"Ken!" she cried. "They mean to offer me—to Moloch—"

"Steady, Edith," he encouraged. "There's a chance we can get back—to our own bodies and time. Lanash is going to help us—"

Lanash had glanced out of the barred window, at the torchlit plaza of worshipers chanting to their towering idol.

"We must be quick!" she cried. "See, they take the first sacrifices forth now!"

Blaine glimpsed the little troop of white-robed children being marched out of the temple by priests, to solemn accompaniment of blaring horns and crashing cymbals.

"Sit here, and face me." Lanash was ordering the girl. "Look into my eyes—and do not resist when I thrust your mind forward across the abyss of time to your body that Sharra now inhabits."

Lanash' eyes became wide, dilated, the pupils expanding enormously. Sharra-Edith looked into them fearfully in the dim light and then her body grew slowly rigid as though gradually frozen by strange force.

Blaine watched, his heart pounding. He saw the face of the hypnot-

tized girl—the exotically lovely face of Sharra—grow set and mask-like, the eyes empty.

"Go forth," Lanash was whispering, her terribly dilated pupils never wavering in their gaze on the other girl's eyes. "Forth from this body—into the gulfs—"

Blaine felt cold sweat on his brow. He knew that already Edith's mind had left this alien body and was hurtling through those roaring abysses outside time and space, seeking like a lost soul for its own body in future time.

Lanash' eyes did not waver, but her lips tightened as though in agony from concentration of mental force. He heard her almost inaudible, rasping whisper.

"She resists me—Sharra is aware of my purpose and resists—she will not leave her new body—"

From out in the torchlit plaza, suddenly silent except for the dull mutter of the distant Roman battering-rams, came the high, shrill cry of the high priest of Moloch.

"Moloch, accept our offerings and withdraw your anger from this city! Sweep away the attackers who menace us!"

Slowly, solemnly, rose the chant of the mighty crowd in fearful repetition.

"Moloch, accept our offerings!"

Blaine, looking in horror, saw that the brazen body of the gigantic idol was now glowing dull red from its interior fires. He saw the high priest step up the metal stair beside the idol and lay a tiny, bound, white-robed form within the enormous brazen arms.

There was a creaking of chains on pulleys as priests behind the idol pulled. In awful silence, the giant brazen arms slowly rose into the air. The bound child lying upon them uttered a whimpering cry as it rolled down the slanting arms, and then dropped through the square opening into the blazing fires inside the idol.

An awful puff of flame from the opening! And then a tremendous, half-terrified and half-exultant shout from the crowd:

"Moloch, receive our sacrifice!"

Blaine turned, shuddering wildly, from that awful spectacle, as the arms were lowered and another child placed upon them.

Lanash' brow was damp, her eyes glaring and terrible as she gazed into the frozen, mindless face of Sharra.

And then abruptly the tension broke, and Lanash staggered weakly back.

"I cannot overcome Sharra's resistance!" she cried despairingly. "I sent this girl's mind forward, to that body of hers that Sharra holds, but I could not force Sharra out of it, for her knowledge of the ancient secret is as great as my own!"

From Sharra's lips came the desperate cry of Edith.

"Ken, I seemed near my own body, my own time—but I was thrust back here! We can't escape!"

Chapter VI Across Time

From out in the plaza, the awful chant of the crowd came again to Blaine's ears:

"Receive our sacrifice, Moloch!"

He heard the pulleys and chains creaking, as still another of the doomed children out there was rolled to fiery death.

He strode to where Lanash sat shaking and sick, her eyes wild.

"Can't you try again?" he cried, but the woman shook her head.

"Sharra's powers are too strong for me—I cannot make her leave the girl's body."

"So she and Ethbaal will triumph over you, then, will live safe and happy in that future time while you perish here," Blaine taunted her fiercely.

Lanash sprang to her feet, tortured to the depths of her hate and jealousy by that thought.

"No!" she cried. "I'll not allow that! I'll—"

A swift flash crossed her eyes. "There is one chance!" she exclaimed suddenly to Blaine. "I cannot overcome Sharra's powers, cannot force this girl's mind to oust her from that new body of hers. But I can overcome my husband Ethbaal, who has no such powers as Sharra. I can send you back into your own body, that Ethbaal now holds."

"But it's not myself I'm thinking of!" Blaine cried. "It's this girl, who must die out there in Moloch's fires in a few minutes, unless we save her!"

"If you get back into your own body in that future age," Lanash cried to him, "you may be able to make Sharra give up this girl's body. It is our only chance!"

"Do it, Ken!" cried the girl. "Even if you fail to help me, you'll have escaped this hideous place yourself."

"I won't go and leave you here!" stormed Blaine. "In a few minutes they're going to take you out there and put you to death in that hideous way."

"You must do it, Ken!" she insisted. "It's the only chance left us."

Blaine saw the force of her reasoning. Torn as he was by awful fear for her, he yet realized that this thing Lanash proposed was the only method that offered even a possible chance of saving her from the ghastly doom close at hand.

"All right," he choked to Lanash. "Go ahead with me, but for God's sake be quick."

"Sit—look close into my eyes," panted Lanash. "Let your mind rush free—"

Blaine sat, clutching the edges of the bench convulsively with his hands, staring into the yellow-flecked eyes of Lanash in which tawny light seemed slowly spinning and whirling.

He could hear shouts from the plaza as the last few of the sacrificial children were given to fiery Moloch. He could hear in the intervals of their shouts, the distant rumble and mutter of the Romans battering at the walls.

Then all this seemed to recede, the cell seemed to fade away from around Blaine. His mind seemed to be in movement, a bodiless sensation of appalling rush through giddy spaces that roared and howled as though peopled by bellowing winds.

Through that monstrous abyss of raging force and light he seemed to rocket at speed unthinkable, a non-material being fleeing instantaneously through dimensionless gulfs

outside all ordinary time and space. Gulfs penetrable only by pure and immaterial thought such as he now was!

He felt his wild rush through infinity slowing, he felt approach to dimly familiar surroundings. He could see nothing yet he could *sense* that he was now hovering near another living mind, Ethbaal's mind that tenanted an unseen body he knew was his own body.

"Forward—into your own body!" came the mental command of Lanash, beating strongly upon his being. "Forward—"

In the roaring gulfs, Blaine seemed struggling forward and then he heard a startled mental cry from Ethbaal: "Sharra! Help me! They seek to regain my body—"

Dreadful struggle of three minds, his own and Ethbaal's and Lanash', battling in non-material chaos of dimensionless abysses outside earth! Blaine could sense Lanash and Ethbaal at deadly grips, could feel Lanash thrusting him forward and pulling Ethbaal toward her—

There was a shock, a snap of forces, a rending, terrible sensation that shuddered violently through Blaine's immaterial intelligence. And then suddenly he could *feel* again, was aware that he was again physical, inhabiting a solid, material form—

He opened his eyes. He lay in his own bedroom, Kenneth Blaine's own dark bedroom, in the villa! He leaped up, turning on the light beside his bed.

He was—Kenneth Blaine again! It was Blaine's clean-cut youthful face that looked out of the bureau

mirror, and not the harsh bearded face of Ethbaal of Carthage.

"God—myself again—," he choked.

The door burst open. It was Edith who burst in—Edith's body, out of which Sharra's eyes looked in alarm.

"Ethbaal!" she cried. "I thought I heard you cry for help—"

Her lips froze. Her dark, widened eyes, staring into Blaine's face, suddenly narrowed.

"You are not Ethbaal," she whispered. "You—the man Blaine—back in your own body—"

"Lanash' work!" she cried ragingly, hell-fires surging into her eyes. "She tried to dispossess me of this form, and when she failed, she sent you back and drew Ethbaal back to his own body in Carthage! But I'll undo her jealous work—"

Her wide, flaring eyes fixed Blaine's. He felt the impact of hypnotic force from them.

But he plunged forward, before the hypnotic power of the woman could grip him. He clutched her silk-clad form from behind, stood grasping her with his hands closed around her throat.

"Give up Edith's body!" he exclaimed fiercely in her ear. "Go back to your own in Carthage, and let her come back to hers—or I'll kill you here and now! Your mind will die with this body if it dies—Lanash told me that."

"You daren't!" she choked, struggling wildly to escape his terrible grip. "You wouldn't do it—"

For answer, Blaine's hands squeezed tighter. He felt her body jerk and quiver wildly as his grip shut off her breath.

He knew that he was killing her—killing Edith Kerr. But it was not really Edith he was killing, but Sharra, devil's priestess in whose body back in Carthage, Edith awaited doom.

Then Blaine heard a choked, gurgling cry from the woman he held, with the last of her failing breath.

"Don't!" she exclaimed strangledly. "I—will go back—"

"Now!" he hissed.

He felt her slim body stiffen. And then, after a moment, she went limp in his arms. Her head lolled lifeless, there was no stir of any muscle.

Still Blaine held her by the throat, fearful of a trick. But still she hung lifeless in his arms.

Had he killed her? Had he slain Edith's body—separated himself forever from the real Edith?

Then, as despair clutched at Blaine's soul, he felt a weak movement of the figure in his arms. She stirred, raised her head feebly, spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Ken!"

He spun her around. Her dazed eyes met him—no longer the darkened, passionate eyes of Sharra, but the clear, bewildered blue eyes of Edith herself.

"Edith!" he exclaimed. "It's you?"

"Ken! Ken!"

She sobbed, clinging close against him, her silken shoulders shaking wildly. It was minutes before she quieted.

"It was—horrible," she gasped. "Back there in the cell in Moloch's temple—when Lanash sent you forward, then Ethbaal, the real Ethbaal, came back into his own body, there in the cell with us.

"He was mad with rage! He struck down Lanash and then attacked me. The priests of Moloch were outside the door, coming to take me to the sacrifice. And suddenly—my mind went black—and after a moment it cleared again and I was here in my own body again."

She looked up, and he saw a haunting horror in her eyes.

"Ken, Sharra came back into my body, then—and was given to Moloch?"

Horror shook Blaine too, as he thought of that. And he knew that had Sharra been aware of what dreadful fate she was going back to, she would have let him kill her rather than go back.

"Yes, Sharra must have gone to Moloch as a sacrifice," he said hoarsely. "And the Romans broke into the city and put its people to the sword, history says. Two thousand years ago—but you and I know now how unreal time is. Edith."

An astonished voice spoke from the door of the little bedroom.

"Edith! What on earth are you and Ken up to?"

It was her father. There was troubled amazement on Doctor John Kerr's genial face, and astonishment too one the face of old Abel McPherson, who peered past his shoulder.

"What's wrong with you two?" Kerr asked anxiously. "You've both been queer, strange and changed the last day or so, as though you were a little crazy."

Blaine looked at Edith. And he drew her trembling figure closer into his arms.

"We'll explain it all to you later, sir," he said hoarsely. "You won't be-

(Continued on page 142)

THE SUPERNAL NOTE

ROG PHILLIPS

Illustrated by WILLIAM A. GRAY

There is a gentleness here—something indescribably fragile. Yet, paradoxically something so strong that it would take a jaded reader indeed to finish this one without a twinge of feeling.

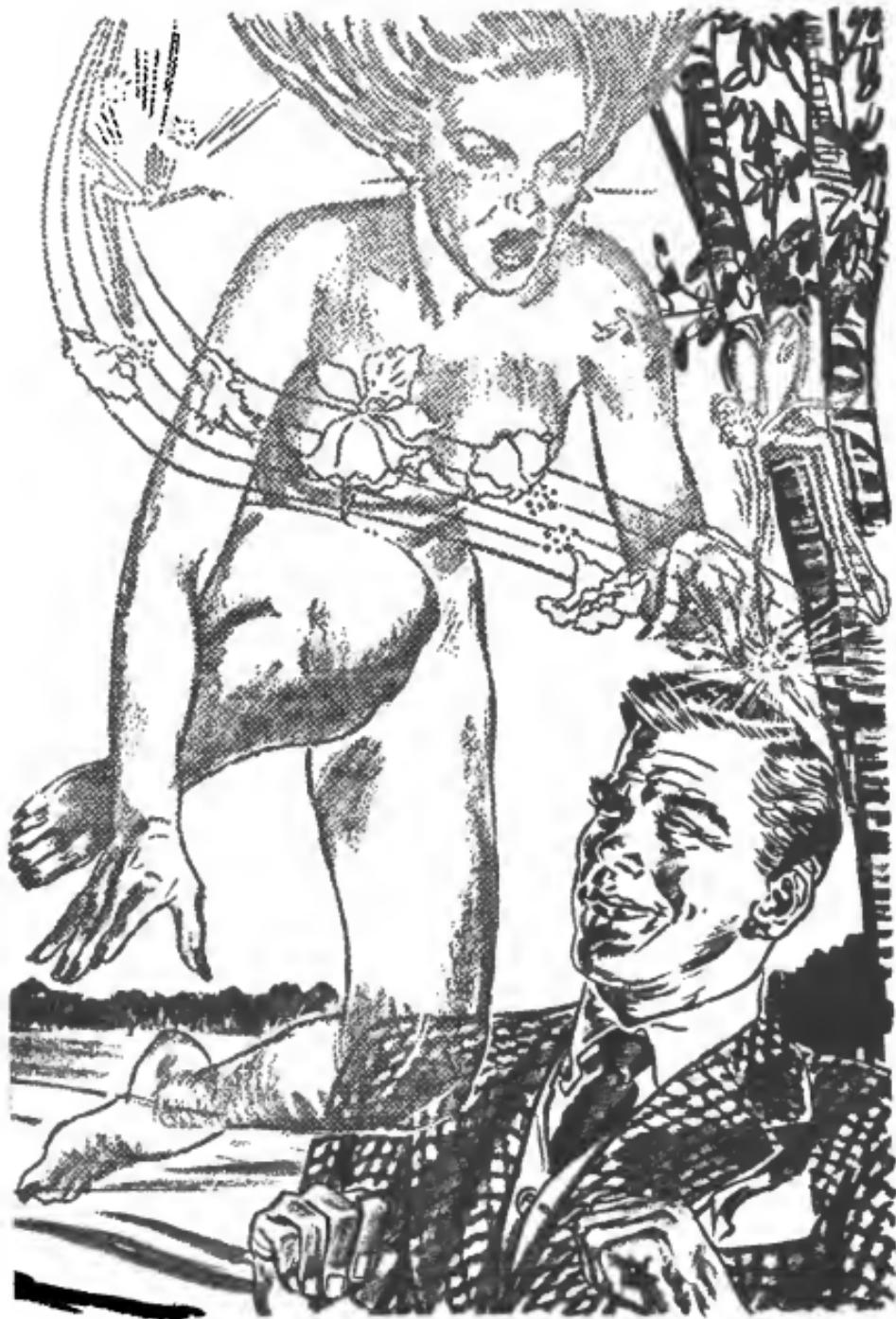
WITHIN the center of the Circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, beyond the Abyss and towering over the dwelling place of Chokmah, yet permeating His every Cell; illuminating the countenance of brooding Daath and yet veiling Her divine form in Primal Mist so that only the demure purity of her bottomless blue eyes appears in the realm of Being; towering above That which IS and yet IS NOT, is the region wherein Eolin plucks the strings of the harp, Kether.

Now, Eolin is a musician, among other things, and the melodies that flow from His fingers are simple beyond the understanding of Man, being now beautiful with the whisper of things not seen nor heard nor dreamt, now sad with the sadness that comes only to those who are great and noble, and who have suffered much, now carefree and gay as are the birds at nesting time, and kittens in sham battle to the death.

Strange and beyond the comprehension of Man is Eolin, the musician, yet even stranger is his harp, Kether, whose living strings

are anchored at one end in the Unmanifest and at the other end in the Manifest. And strange though the harp Kether is—so much stranger is Eolin Himself, who is strange beyond the ken of Man. Infinitely more strange is the music and the notes that come into Being from the strings, to blend and dance in a rhythm of sound and movement and other things which intoxicate the minds of Men and Angels as the ripples from the strings of Kether move and impart Life and Motion to the calm surface of the seas of Binah near which lies the dwelling place of Chokmah, eventually to spill across the Abyss into the regions where dwell men and angels.

And as the ripple and laughter of the music from the fingers of Eolin reaches across the Abyss to cascade like a merry waterfall, fleeing with virgin confusion from the loving embrace of Ghesed recoiling with alarm from the strong embrace of Geburah, resting for a moment to drink of the beauty of Tiphareth whose labyrinthine grottos subtly remold the melody of Eolin so that Man can glimpse its strange beauty, it reaches the Veil whose golden web



shimmers and quivers in delirious ecstasy at the caress of the notes as they pass. Then the music bursts forth triumphantly into Netzach where angels dance to its rhythm; swells into glorious splendor in Hod as it swirls in deep eddies; cascading down and down, seemingly to endless depths until it pounds against the foundations of Yesod, sending a spray of cool delight back even to the Abyss and beyond. But now the base and treble notes rise into the ascendancy and blend into a quiet, deep melody that flows like a river, winding its tortuous way between the grassy banks in the Meadows of Malkuth, where the timid deer pause to drink and taste its coolness, and where the tired wanderer may rest and bathe his aching feet on his journey in search of the Holy Grail.

And then? The sweet, fluid song of life and love that once saw its beginning in the flowing rhythm of the fingers of Eolin, the musician, as they strummed the strings of the harp, Kether, seep into the thirsty sands of the Meadow which is called Malkuth, to sink below into the regions where dwell the Qliphoth, the fallen Sephiroth, which once dwelt with Angels in the time before Time began, when all that is and ever was was not, and Eolin slept and dreamed of life and love and beauty while his idle fingers caressed, even in sleep, the silent strings of the harp.

Disdainful of the evil Qliphoth, full of love for the angels of Tiphareth, ever patient with the children of Yesod, Daath looks down across the Abyss and through the

Veil, and her heart lurks in the depths of her eyes as she caresses the children of Man with her gaze, for they are her first Love.

There are those among men who look up and glimpse the blueness of the eyes of Daath and sense the beauty of her form behind the Primal Mist, the dimly perceived contour of breast, the beckoning smile, the grace of form, and beauty of motion. And once he has glimpsed any part of this Supernal Form of Daath, he knows no rest or respite from his journey upward past the Veil, where, when the sands of time run low, and Eolin grows weary, he may stand on the edge of the Abyss and gaze across its impassable expanse, drinking in the beauty of Daath unveiled, the Primal Mists grown tenuous so that She stands naked and unashamed before her lover and beckons him on, her brooding eyes mocking him for his hesitation, her lips coaxing with their redness and tender promise, her curving breasts soft and inviting, her body calling and reaching with yearning to embrace him and blend with his forever in the ecstasy of divine procreation.

Now, once long ago, or perhaps far into the future (since the melody from the strings of Kether is simple beyond the understanding of Man, and oft repeats itself) a single low note of infinite beauty throbbed forth across the circle whose Center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, and its subtle harmony touched even Eolin himself who paused for a moment to watch its passage across the Abyss.

In the blue depths of the eyes of

Daath a flame of anticipation came into Being, and flashed a message to Chesed who caught the Note of ineffable beauty in loving embrace as it sought to flee. Down, Chesed dropped, straight to the grassy plains of the Meadow which is called Malkuth, holding in firm embrace the Note with its Supernal Purity untouched by the fierceness of Geburah, unaltered by the labyrinthine grottos of Tipharoth, unbattered by the fall from dizzying heights to Yesod, and untainted by the Qliphoth as they lurk in the sands that lie beneath the Meadow.

There, standing on the grassy Meadow, Chesed paused, the Note of Supernal Beauty held in firm embrace, until, across the horizon a traveler appeared. Then quickly she sped over the plain, her form invisible, her presence unsuspected, to plant the Supernal Note above his head where it rested in all its untarnished purity, throbbing and pulsating in Ethereal splendor.

Then Chesed rose and sped into the sky, her passage so swift that the lacy film of the streaming folds of her attire molded itself to her figure, so that even angels swooned in joyous ecstasy at her beauty revealed. Then, back in her place, she looked down upon the traveler; and he, looking up, saw only a point of scintilating radiance, a star.

The uniformed man tapped Steve's arm politely and said, "Pardon me, sir."

Steve straightened and gave a last regretful glance at Venus while the uniformed man swung open the gate, then handed him his gate pass and hurried across the concrete

while behind him the loudspeakers blared forth the announcement that all passengers on flight 32 to Albuquerque could board the plane through gate one.

He climbed the steps to the plane and bent forward so that his six-foot and more frame could enter, then paused in surprise. His eyes widened, betraying his feelings.

The uniformed young lady who stood just inside might well have made any man pause in surprise. Her features were a symphony of beauty in form and color and expression. Right now they were betraying her recognition and pleasure at Steve's stare, and also the effort of concentration to hide her pleased response and utter the stereotyped "hello" in just the right tones of friendly welcome that had been drilled so insistently into her at the TWA school for stewardesses. She succeeded in doing so and listened to the deep timbre of Steve's voice in her mind long after Steve himself had passed her to take the rear seat just two feet away.

Steve settled back in his seat and watched idly as other passengers entered his range of vision and climbed up the sloping aisle of the two-motored plane to fill the remaining seats. At his back the melodious voice of the stewardess heralded the arrival of each passenger with a soft "hello" that seemed meant for him alone. Her voice held the richness and beauty of tone that is the peculiar property of a cultured southern voice. Steve brought to his mind's eye the graceful, humorous curving of her

lips as she formed the word, and thrilled to the memory of her softly tinted eyes, the graceful curve of her chin, the flawless purity of her face and the dark luster of her hair.

It was almost as if he had seen and known them before. He MUST have. But where? He closed his eyes in an effort to recall.

Unseen by him, but heard, the passengers made their way up the aisle to the seats. The crying of a baby came and died down toward the front. It vied with the angry whimpering of a puppy in the forward compartment just behind the pilot's cabin. The two were so alike that when one stopped momentarily it was difficult to determine which kept on, the baby or the puppy.

A slamming noise signalled the sealing of the plane. Steve opened his eyes and half turned so that he could look at the stewardess. She turned from the door she had just closed, and, seeing that Steve was smiling at her, she returned his smile.

He noticed how red her lips seemed, set off by the whiteness of her skin which seemed even more white in contrast to the dark blackness of her hair. Her smile was personal just as her voice was.

Outside, a motor roared. Regretfully Steve turned his attention to fastening his seat strap in preparation for taking off.

As the plane began to move forward the stewardess made a hasty inspection to be sure all the passengers were properly strapped into their seats, then dropped into the vacant place in the seat across

the aisle from Steve. Jealousy tinged his thoughts as he looked at the man beside her, and regret that he had not chosen the double seat instead of the single. Then he laughed at himself. After all, she was only a stewardess on a plane on which he would ride for but a few brief hours. He was one passenger out of many dozens that she encountered daily, and a very mediocre one at that.

The plane paused, its motors idling. One motor speeded up until it vibrated and roared in deafening blasts.

Out of the corner of his eye Steve noticed that the stewardess was paying no attention to the man sitting next to her. Instead she was looking at him. He smiled at her, and she returned his smile. He searched his mind for something to say.

"Nice night for flying, isn't it," he said, then silently cursed himself for triteness.

"Yes, it is," the stewardess replied, and the melody of her voice told him that just saying something was more wonderful than anything clever that could possibly be said.

With a burst of acceleration the plane began to move across the field, faster and faster, until the tail lifted so that the aisle didn't slope any more. With almost perceptible tentacles the plane reached for the sky, missed, tried again desperately, grasping the elusive tendrils of Space as they slipped past, then gained a hold, swinging free from the ground below.

Desperately the plane clutched at wisps of evening breeze, its mood shifting from fearful uncertainty to

more and more security, until at last the lights of Oklahoma City were far below. Then the plane relaxed with a sigh, purring in tabbyish contentment, and one after another of the passengers matched its mood, unfastening their safety belts.

The stewardess began at the front of the plane and checked the seat numbers after the names of the passengers. Steve watched her covertly, admiring her slim, well formed body, the play of expression on her face. At last she came to him. In some inexplicable way he knew that she had been looking forward to finding out which name on the list was his. He wanted to ask her what hers was, but didn't.

"Would you like to have a snack?" she asked after writing his seat number after his name.

"Yes, I would," Steve replied. "And some coffee, please." He looked into her eyes and they looked back, laughing with pleasure and blue delight.

The snacks, as snacks always are, were infinitesimal cross sections of what had once been sandwiches. The coffee was neither hot nor cold.

The stewardess finished distributing snacks to all the passengers, then asked Steve if he wished more coffee.

"Yes, I would," Steve replied.

She took his tray. Steve stood up and followed her, making no move to return to his seat after she gave him more coffee.

"How long before we get to Albuquerque?" he asked conversationally.

"Three hours," the stewardess replied. "Too bad we don't have

some cards. We could play gin rummy to pass the time."

Wordlessly Steve reached into his pocket and drew out a deck of cards.

The puppy's voice up forward drifted through the curtain of the motors' droning monotone. The baby was silent. Plumes of cigaret smoke rose lazily here and there along the rows of seated passengers.

Now and then the plane lurched slightly as it encountered an air pocket, and the throaty sound of the motors deepened for a moment as they dipped more deeply into the night.

Quickly the stewardess brought out two small cases and set them on the floor, covering them with a pillow. Then she let down a folding seat clamped to the side of the ship and brought out the hardbacked folder in which she kept her report sheet to use as a card table.

Steve sat down on the pillow cases and the stewardess sat on the built-in seat, placing the improvised table surface on their knees. Then he shuffled the cards and dealt.

A half-dozen draws, and the stewardess ginned.

"Hey, that isn't fair," Steve complained. "I'm the passenger, you know. You're supposed to let me win." As she chuckled at this, the thought came to Steve, "In a couple of hours this will be over and she'll be gone."

"What's your name?" he asked quietly.

"My name's Mary," she answered. "And your first name is—?"

"Steve," he answered. Then he held out his hand, his mouth twisting into a mask of conventional

humor to hide the pleasure of this moment and its accompanying certainty of ending which would leave an emptiness in his life.

"Pleased to meet you," Mary said, slipping her hand comfortably into his.

"How long have you been a stewardess?" Steve asked as Mary reshuffled the cards.

"Only since February," Mary answered. "February twentieth."

"That's not very long," Steve commented. "But most stewardesses don't last long. Sooner or later they meet a nice guy like me and get married."

"Not me," Mary answered, dealing out the cards carefully. "I'm going to make a career of being a stewardess." "I'm a writer," Steve volunteered.

"Oh?" Mary said, arching her eyebrows. "Do you write stories?" She sorted her cards while waiting for his reply.

"Yes," Steve answered. "If you will tell me where to send it I'll send you one of them."

Mary reached up behind her and pulled down a black patent leather handbag, extracting a card from its depths. On it was only her name. She penciled in her address and handed it to Steve. He placed it in his wallet.

The baby up forward started to cry. A quiet note sounded from the call bell and Mary went to answer the summons.

The motors droned monotonously and the plane lurched more often than before as the air grew increasingly more rough.

Unseen and unfelt the Note in its

untarnished purity settled a little lower, sending out faint quivers into the surrounding atmosphere.

A farmer far below, hurrying to the house from the barn to get more hot water for a sick calf, looked up and saw the plane passing overhead. He stared in wonder at the halo of bright radiance that bathed the ship in its passage beneath the stars and attributed it to the red, white, and green lights that winked slowly from their perches on the ship.

Eolin strummed softly on the strings of the harp, Kether, while Daath watched the ship's flight from beyond the Abyss and Chесed blinked slowly in rapt attention, her cloak of mist glistening brightly as it hung in loose folds, hiding her beauty from the eyes of men and angels, so that she appeared only as a point of scintillating radiance in the heavens, a star.

In the thirsty sands which lie below the Meadow which is called Malkuth, the Qliphoth, those Evil Sephiroth, reached hungrily upward, clutching at the radiant purity of the Note from the strings of the harp, Kether, longing to possess it for themselves. With each grasp they came closer, and as they missed and fell back into the slime to try again, the plane lurched feebly in its flight, but struggled on, helpless to do more than creep across the heavens, its terror-ridden propellers clutching each elusive breeze, its fragile wings fluttering imperceptibly with a helplessness as it tried to burst the barriers of man-made structure and flee from the danger that it sensed below.

All unknowing in its belly a baby

cried and a puppy whimpered out its lonesomeness, while people slept, or thought of things mundane, of no importance in the scheme of things above.

Mary came back and resumed her place. The game went on. This Steve won and crowed triumphantly while Mary pretended to be very irked at having lost her lead.

"Would you like a sandwich?" she asked suddenly.

"I am hungry at that," Steve admitted.

Mary pulled out a drawer and took out two sandwiches.

"These really belonged to the captain," she confessed, chuckling, after they had bitten into them. "But there's one left, so he won't starve."

As if in answer to her mention of him the captain appeared through the forward hatch and made his way down the aisle. When he saw the lone remaining sandwich he glanced with lifted eyebrows at the back of the stewardess, but said nothing.

He stood and watched the progress of the game while he ate his sandwich.

"How's it coming?" he finally asked.

"Neck and neck." Steve said with a grin.

"He's way ahead of me." Mary corrected. "I'll have to have a lot of luck to beat him out."

The captain made his way back forward while Steve shuffled the cards and dealt.

"You know," he said as he laid the deck down and turned the top card over, "ever since I got on the plane I've been trying to place you. I don't mean you, but I used to know

someone that looked almost exactly like you. I can't remember who it was, or even where it was. If there WAS someone, she would be about thirty years old now. You aren't that old so I know it wasn't you. But it was someone like you and a house with brown-paneled walls and broad eaves."

"It couldn't have been me," Mary said. "I'm only twenty-two."

"I know it wasn't you," Steve said. "It doesn't really matter, but it aroused my curiosity. It must have been in Spokane. It couldn't have been anyplace else."

"I've never been in Spokane," Mary said, drawing a card and studying it.

"It couldn't have been you even if you had," Steve replied. "Do you know you're very nice looking?"

Mary darted Steve a mischievous smile.

"Thank you," she said. She slipped the card she was holding into her hand and discarded another.

"Is that address on your card your home?" asked Steve.

"No," Mary answered. "Three of us girls live there. We have an apartment, and we are all TWA hostesses."

Steve rejected the idea of taking the card Mary had laid down, and drew off the deck.

"Oh," he said.

The Note drifted forward, and its aura stole around the two as it settled more firmly. Mary and Steve did not look up. They were intent on their cards, yet were drinking of the nearness of each other, their spirits reaching over the gap between them and touching wonderfully and amazed, and marveling at the beau-

ty and delight of the Note which bathed them with its freshness, as the morning sun peeking through the clouds sends warmrays to change the dew into priceless jewels nestling in the grass.

As the Note began to blend its Substance with the souls of Steve and Mary, it gathered in its streaming outer rays and wrapped them more securely into place.

Below, the Qliphoth raged in helpless impotence and sank beneath the slime to nurse their hurts. In the sky the plane droned on and on, and Venus winked her solitary eye.

"Darn!" Mary said as Steve laid his hand down and ginned. Hastily she added up the score. "That's the finish," she added, glancing at her watch. "Fifteen minutes before we get to Albuquerque."

Steve picked up the cards and put them in his pocket, helping Mary put the cases and the pillow away.

"Have you ever been in Albuquerque?" Mary asked.

"No, I haven't," Steve replied.

"Well, we'll be there for ten minutes," Mary went on. "Run into the depot and look over the collection of things there. They were all made by the Indians. Some of them are very nice."

"I'll do that," Steve agreed. "Do you go on from here?"

"No," Mary said regretfully, "I'm on the next plane back to Oklahoma City."

"Damn!" Steve said. Mary looked at him in a way that told she agreed with his sentiments.

Up forward the light behind the sign flashed on and made visible the

lettering which said, "No smoking. Fasten your belts."

Steve dropped into his seat, and Mary slipped into the one across the aisle. The plane, once more confident of itself, settled slowly, testing the feel of Earth once before letting its wheels come with finality into contact. The motors snorted with animal spirit and bit into the midnight air as they pulled the plane into position near the depot and, with a final spurt, coughed and died.

Steve left the plane first and was in the depot before the other passengers. Sure enough, there was a large display of jewelry made by the local Indians.

He examined it with interest until the loudspeaker warned all passengers to return to the plane.

Then he pushed through the swinging doors that let outside and walked toward the plane.

Mary was ahead, standing as if waiting for him. Something tugged painfully at his heart at the sight of her, and for the first time the realization dawned that she would not be with him when the plane took off again.

As he drew near her, she held out her hand, a warm smile on her face.

"Well, Steve," she said quietly. "I hope you have a pleasant trip."

He took her hand in his. He didn't dare look into her eyes lest she see what he had suddenly discovered.

"I hope we see each other again some time," he said lamely, feeling the utter futility of anything he COULD say or do in the few brief seconds before he would have to get back on the plane.

He felt a desire to plant his lips on

hers. He knew he wouldn't and he knew, too, that he would hate himself for the rest of the trip for not having done it.

When she echoed his, "I hope we do see each other again," he relinquished the comfort of her handclasp and turned to the plane.

Inside, Steve glanced up at the new stewardess who smiled warmly at him and said, "hello," in the tone of friendly welcome that had been drilled into her at the TWA school for air hostesses.

Steve paused in amazement at her plainness. He knew it was just the contrast, but it still surprised him that anyone could look so plain and uninteresting.

He didn't return her greeting, but brushed past her with an apologetic smile and dropped into his seat. He couldn't tell her that to answer would have been to desecrate something holy.

As he fastened his safety belt the entrance door slammed closed. One motor coughed and then settled into a steady roar, then the other. The plane moved across the field, took off, and wended its way into the night.

Above, beyond the Veil, across the Abyss, Daath watched in brooding silence, a gleam of satisfaction lurking in the infinite depths of her deep blue eyes, which are all that is perceptible to Man in the Realm of Being.

And Chesed peeked demurely through her veil and smiled serenely at the slowly creeping plane. For visible in the realms above, but invisible and unsuspected on the Meadow

which is called Malkuth, a faintly luminous strand of infinite purity spanned the gap between the plane and the depot.

The Note which had come into Being through the fingers of Eolin, the musician, pure and undefiled, in its journey from the strings of the harp, Kether, which are anchored on one end to that which is not and on and on the other end to that which is, had reached its preordained fruition. Anchored to the hearts of two people, it made them one.

Now Eolin's fingers flew more rapidly as he stroked the strings of the harp, and from the strings a new melody was born, to ripple the surface of the seas of Binah and cross the Abyss to the loving clutch of Chesed and flee in laughing delight, recoiling from the fierceness of Geburah, resting in the labyrinthian grottos of peaceful Tiphareth, touching the lips of angels in light caress in Netzach, swirling in wild rhythm as it plunged over the brink of Hod to fall down and down until Yesod broke its mad plunge and turned it into the deep and peaceful channel that winds through the grassy Meadow that is called Malkuth.

Then the Note, now anchored to the heartstrings of two mortals, blended its tone into the music of Eolin, vibrating in echoing harmony with the song that came into Being in the regions beyond the Abyss where brooding Daath watches eternally, in the center of the circle whose Center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

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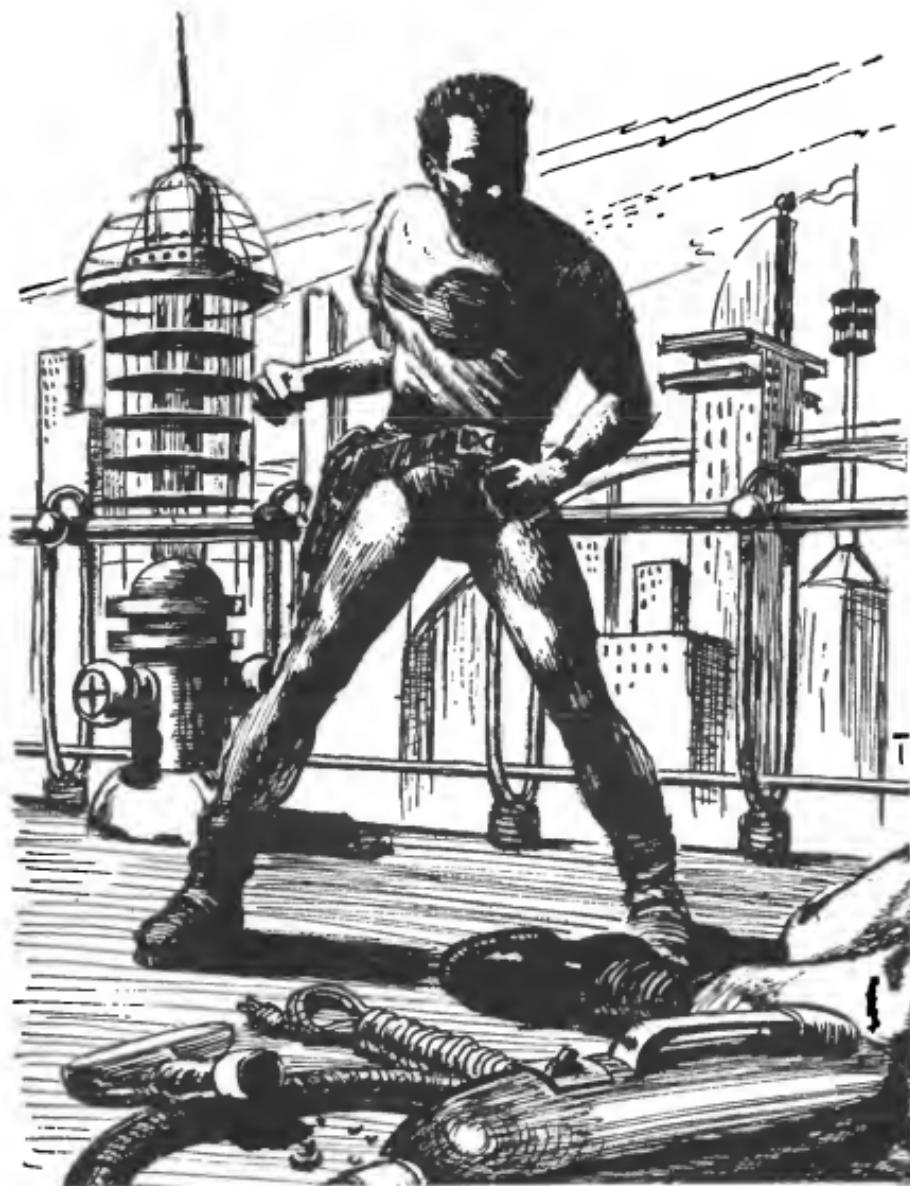
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WHEN BETTER BUDGIES ARE BUILT

BRYCE WALTON

Illustrated by WILLIAM SLADE

I'd walked about twenty miles. It was hotter than a Sergeant with a hot-foot. And the vacuum cleaner I was lugging had started to weigh a thousand pounds. Ever since graduating from the University of California, I'd been a very successful vacuum-cleaner salesman, one of the best in fact. They'd started saying around the offices that Marty Dunstall could sell ice-packs to Eskimos, cigarette lighters to the Devil, and hot sauce to Yvonne de Carlo. Stuff like that. Anyway I was good.

But today I was blue and on the verge of heat-stroke. I rang the doorbell of this little innocent-appearing white cottage and a nicely stacked blonde in a starched dress answered the door.

"Come in," she said, partly with her mouth and partly with the rest of her. "I'm interested—already."

I was in. I tried to keep my mind on my spiel, while she stood close to me and all the time the pressure was rising in me like in a pressure-cooker, and my forehead was getting



slippery. A nice, quiet, cool little cottage with vines dwindling down the pastel walls and a couch squared around two whole walls of the room. But all this isn't really important any more. Because I never saw that blonde again, nor the house.

I emptied a sack-full of dirt in the middle of the rug. Then I went over to plug in the Drakeson Never-Fail Vacuum. I hesitated while I bent over there looking at the blonde's legs, but I was thinking of something else. All at once, I remembered how that stranger back at the office, some guy named Divers, had given me my Vacuum. I hesitated while I bent over a new job and the boss had said to have Dunstall try it out. Come to think of it, that was an odd incident. Who the hell was Divers, I thought, and also, coming to think of it, this was one very funny-looking vacuum cleaner.

It was bulky and fat in the wrong places like a "do you want to lose five pounds a day" ad. I looked up. The blonde was looking down at me and smiling, and she had one hand on her hip. Nice lips too, cushiony, pouting a little.

"This is a new-type cleaner," I said, "and fortunately for you, you're one of the first ladies to try it out."

"Yes," she said huskily. "I'm pretty bored with the old type."

"You won't be long, madame," I said, and I plugged in the cord. Metal rang in my head and all at once that nice room began to look like the inside of a steam bath. I heard a scream, and all I could see was the blonde's eyes widening at me like spilled wine on a white tablecloth. I tried to yell, I tried to move—I could

do neither. A wavering curtain of zig-zagging light shot around me and my hair crackled like puffed wheat. And I couldn't see that room any more, and worse yet, the blonde was just a memory. I felt like I'd grabbed hold of a high-tension wire. A high shrill head-splitting whine was growing higher and higher and I stretched with it. Any minute I knew I was going to snap, pop, split, fly in a million pieces.

And then my mind went as blank as a Christmas turkey's.

I woke up. My head felt like a busted orange crate, and when I moved a little I felt like dropping right back down into that pleasant darkness from which I'd just come. When I opened my eyes, though, I forgot my head and the rest of me.

I was someplace else. What I was seeing was odd enough, different enough to give me a chilled feeling. The way you feel in the night when you've been having a nightmare and you wake up and you don't know for sure that you're awake because some of the other stuff still hangs on. . . .

I sat up, and a useless paralyzing panic grew inside of me all the way to the creaking hair on my head. Indecision and doubt sparred inside of me, and I sat there listening to my heart rapping against my throat.

A guy stood there looking down at me. He was about six foot six, proportionately built, with a torso like a gladiator's and blond hair that came down to his shoulders. We were in a room like you might find if you walked inside the frame of one of those modernistic paintings at an art show. All bright angles and odd-shaped metallic tables suspended

from the ceiling with wire. Light oscillated from the walls and that was pretty and pleasant—if you had any idea where you were, why, and how.

"Get up," the man said.

I sat there. "What the hell's going on?" I said.

He grabbed me and started using me for an excercise boy, and then he propped me up against the wall. Behind him, through the wall which was all glass, I saw a city right out of Captain Video. Spiralling walkways curving like suspended confetti, and bullets shooting along in bright flashes, and people streaming like ants.

I got myself all set to rock Superman back on his heels. I said. "Already you annoy me. You're beginning to get in my hair like peanuts gets in your teeth."

He stared, then reached in his mouth and took out his teeth and examined them, puzzled. They were a nice pair of falsies. I grabbed them out of his hand, and moved around to the middle of the room. He looked pretty funny, handsome and perfect and bronzed, but with his toothless gums gaping like a very old soldier about ready to fade away.

"Shtoonk," I said. "You tell me what's going on, or I hurl these molars right out the window. I don't know what they're made of, but after falling from as high up as we seem to be, there won't be enough left of these choppers to dent a cream puff."

He scrubbed a very nervous hand over his locks and eyed that set of dentures in my hand like a dame looks at her best friend's husband.

"Give them back!" he gasped finally, his jaws sinking in like a bust-

ed accordian. "If Ella saw me this way, she would be really lost to me forever."

"Why'd you get rough with me?" I said. "And why drag me onto a movie set—?" But I was kidding myself. I knew I wasn't loose among a lot of phony props.

He reached. "Huh-uh," I said. "No toothies 'till you talkie."

He seemed puzzled. "I thought you people from the past appreciated nothing but violence. I only acted that way toward you because I thought it was polite."

I laughed. "Then it's only proper," I said, "to return your thoughtful gesture of good will." And I brought one up from the general area of my knees. I'd boxed in college, and played football, and this one I brought up from my knees. I sent it at his chin like a bowling ball, like you need a ten-strike and you hate the pins; straightaway, no English. It sounded pretty bad, and his head flashed back and hit bottom and then he was lying there, his breath coming in gurgles like soda pop out of a bottle.

I went to the window and looked out. It was a big city, but it had no resemblance whatsoever to the Kansas City I had departed from so mysteriously. This room wasn't that cottage where I'd been about to demonstrate a vacuum cleaner. And I had a chilly feeling that that blonde was a long way off—somewhere.

I turned. Big Boy was getting up, groggy, and walking like a punch-drunk fighter. He shook his head ruefully. I whispered. "What year is this?"

"2351 to you, Mr. Dunstall. To

me—350 A.B.—that is, after the bomb."

I leaned against the wall. "All right," I finally whispered. "What am I doing here? And how did that damn vacuum cleaner do it? And incidentally, what's your name?"

"You're here to sell something," the guy said in a peculiar toothless lisp. "The vacuum cleaner was really a time-machine too complicated for you to understand. And my name is Randolph Wakeman. Now, can I have my teeth back?"

"Nope," I said. "Not until I get all the dope on what's really happening to me, and why." I went over and dangled those expensive choppers out the window. Wakeman was a very vain guy and he winced at the idea of their plunging to destruction. "I was intending," he lisped awkwardly, his toothless gums smacking desperately, "all the time to explain it to you, naturally."

"Okay," I said. "Explain it all—naturally."

"I can hardly talk," he said, "without my teeth."

So I tossed them back to him, and he stuffed them eagerly into his face. He looked better, except that he looked just as scared, and hopeless, and beat.

One thing he explained quickly. He was sales manager for a colossal Department Store called Herbert's. There were only two stores that supplied the population of Mid-America with everything. There weren't any other stores, no small merchants. Efficiency. Two gigantic stores, each competing with the other, and between them, supplying everybody with practically everything.

You get the picture. Imagin Gim-

ble's and Macy's—in four hundred years.

They sold people the same things largely. They competed only for more and more efficient service. And now, according to Wakeman, both stores had perfected the super gadget for ultimate efficiency in servicing customers. Something Wakeman called a BUDGIE. Both stores had been working on it for a long time, both had perfected it recently. First it had been advertised to an eagerly waiting population as the Budgateer and the Budget Buddy. But then he got to be called merely the BUDGIE.

The BUDGIE, once installed, did everything for the home and the family. Each Department Store had installed the pipes, ducts, tubes, etc., running from the store to each house in Mid-America. Whoever sold the majority of the population BUDGIES first, would have business sewed up for good. Once installed, hooked into the intricate electronic distribution system of one or the other of the two stores, the BUDGIE supplied everything — automatically — and of course everything came from the store that had sold and installed the BUDGIE.

The BUDGIE did everything. It bought all the consumer goods, provided entertainment, saw that everything was delivered on time and in just the right way, including clothing, cleaning, meals cooked and ready to serve, maid service, printing, laundry, painting, baby-care, furnishings, everything.

"And whoever wins this selling race," Wakeman said desperately, "will control all consumer-seller relationship from now on. The other store will automatically have to go

out of business. You see, the BUDGIE is suited to each family's income. Once installed, the dials set, the buttons pushed, the switches set—*everything's* taken care of from then on, for life. No more bother with ordering or shopping, no delivery troubles because everything you need comes to you through the supply tubes when needed and it's all done automatically, working directly from the store that installed the BUDGIE. And if most of the BUDGIES sold are, for instance, Webster's BUDGIES, it means that all this service will have to come from Webster's store."

Wakeman bit at his lip. "And for life!" he repeated. "A small down payment and the BUDGIE is paid for over a period of time determined by the average life-span of the owner, plus his average income expectancy."

"Wow!" I said. "What an idea! So now you have to sell most of the population BUDGIES before Webster's store does, or you'll be out of a job, for good."

"Yes," sighed Wakeman. "Unless I want to take some humiliating job working for Webster's, or retire at a very young age on unemployment insurance. I couldn't do anything else. This is a highly specialized age. I've been educated all my life to be a salesman, and now I'm the sales-manager. This is the ultimate, THE sale, Dunstall. Whichever store sells the most BUDGIES will have made the final sale—*whoever* buys a BUDGIE buys everything he'll ever need the rest of his life—with *one* purchase!"

"So what's the trouble?" I said. I was beginning to feel excited. My

heart was going ninety to nothing. "Get out there with your men, man, and sell those BUDGIES!"

Wakeman whispered. "My men and I have been out for three days. Five hundred of the best salesmen ever developed by the best sales psychologists. And we've only managed to sell a few BUDGIES. We've got to sell at least seventy percent of the population BUDGIES. Something's the matter. Sales resistance . . . it's natural. People know how important a BUDGIE will be to them. That when they buy a BUDGIE, they're really buying, all at once, everything they'll ever need for the rest of their lives. Naturally there's extreme sales-resistance."

"No such thing as an unbreakable sales-resistance," I said.

"My store—Herbert's—" Wakeman said, "depends on my sales force, and myself. The Store, its thousands of employees, depend on it. But we can't seem to sell enough BUDGIES, not nearly enough!"

"You've got to unload those BUDGIES, man" I said.

"I know! Webster's haven't even bothered to advertise, and—"

"How about this Webster outfit," I said. "They selling BUDGIES?"

"That's what I was starting to explain, Dunstall. Webster's haven't even *tried* to sell BUDGIES. Not a man in the field. They seemed to have known from the start that sales resistance would be so high we couldn't sell enough BUDGIES. They just sit around and laugh at my efforts."

"They've got something up their sleeve," I said. "Maybe they know you can't sell many BUDGIES. But they damn well know they *can*."

"That's just it. And they're going into the field to sell their BUDGIES tomorrow!"

I stared at Wakeman. Now I saw it. "You went to all the trouble to grab me out of the year 1951 and bring me here into the future—so I could give you some tips on selling BUDGIES!"

Wakeman nodded. "Time-travel was perfected some time back, but its use is illegal. I was desperate, so I took one of the time-machines out of the storage house of our store, and sent a man named Divers back to your time, with another machine. Divers looked around until he found what he thought was the most dynamic sales force in operation in your time—and he picked out the best salesman among the group, which happened to be you, Dunstall. The vacuum-cleaner was, in fact, a time machine—"

"But you guys should be better salesmen," I said. "Four hundred more years of experience . . ."

"Not that simple at all," Wakeman said. "I made a study of your time, when I was doing some research once for the Store. Selling reached its apex of efficiency during the mid-twentieth century. Believe me, Dunstall, you boys were real salesmen. We've lost the aggressiveness, the audacity, the over-riding self-confidence, the egotism, the unconscious psychological factors common to your time that made salesmen so highly effective. Things like hostility and sadism on the part of the salesmen, and the frustrations and masochism and gullibility on the part of buyers—"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Let's not

get too clinical. What do I get out of this?"

"A gadget," Wakeman said. "Something common to us but which will soon make you a fortune. We'll return you to your time, and you can take a gadget with you, and the plans for it."

"What kind of gadget?"

"Any kind. Any kind you think would be the most valuable to you. And if you don't get me out of this situation, you'll never go back to your own time!"

"Okay," I said. "Fine, Wakeman. Let's get at it. First, I'd like to talk to your sales force. And I'd also like to see this BUDGIE, and a complete breakdown on it, all the details. I'd also like to try out a few sales myself, and also I'd want to see the ads you been running. I can sell anything to damn near anybody, but first I've got to know the whole set-up, you understand what I'm driving at?"

"Yes," whispered Wakeman. He took a letter from the top of one of those suspended metal tables and handed it to me. "I just received this this afternoon. It presents some sort of complication, and frankly, I'm scared."

I took the note and read it. Then I was scared. "Is this the real dope?" I said. Wakeman nodded. "Doctor Lietencratz who wrote that note is one of the most noted scientists in Mid-America. He did most of the basic planning on the development of the BUDGIE, and for the past year he's been working on robots. That's a known fact. He's primarily a cybernetics specialist—"

Again I was reading the note:

Dear Mr. Wakeman: I, as a scientist responsible to the people of Mid-America, have committed a grave and what might prove to be a fatal error in dealing with your competitor, Webster's Department Store. And more specifically with a gentleman there by the name of Max Gaer. Believe me, as things stand now, you have absolutely no chance of selling BUDGIES in any amount compared with the BUDGIES Webster will sell. Actually, what has happened has made the sale of BUDGIES comparatively unimportant. I cannot go into further details, except when I see you personally—a step I desperately urge you to arrange immediately. Come to my laboratory at once! Suffice to say that my terrible error lies in having put into the hands of Max Gaer five hundred robots against which the best *human* salesman will be totally helpless. Please contact me at once. Even the selling of BUDGIES is no longer important. These robots can sell *anything*. I'm awaiting your visit. May I again stress the urgency of this crisis? The welfare of Mid-America as a Democracy and a free-thinking institution is at stake.

Yours respectfully—

Doctor Boni Lietencratz

I handed the note back. "What does that really mean when translated?" I asked.

Wakeman said, "We're going over

there right now and find out. Ah—that is, if you're interested."

"I'm interested," I said. "If I can't drum up a way to outsell a bunch of mechanical men, then I'll go back to college."

En route to see Doctor Boni Lietencratz, in a projectile that hurtled along a monorail above that endless city like a bullet, Wakeman pointed out the Herbert Department Store. All I could see was a gray cube about ten miles square and about twice as high as the Empire State building had been back where there had been 'an Empire State Building.

"Of course the only thing compared to it anywhere on Earth," Wakeman said, "is Webster's. No one really knows any more. Sometimes Herbert's is the bigger and has more workers, and sometimes it's Webster's."

My hair was tingling. We were going about five hundred miles an hour, and I felt about as permanent as a tenant without a lease. This guy, Wakeman, might not be able to use aggression the way we did back in 1951—and maybe, to him, working a guy over was just being polite—but he had me on one helluva spot. Either I played ball—or I'd be stuck in 350 A.B., and from what I had seen and heard about 350 A.B., I didn't want any part of it. It wasn't all negative, however, but that didn't make the possibility of failure on my part any easier—my getting a gadget. I had to get back to 1951 for a gadget to do me any good, 350 A.D. was lousy with gadgets.

In fact, as it turned out, the ability to distinguish between a gadget and

a human being was strictly coincidental.

The stream-lined job we were traveling in stopped, and we stepped through the door, through a wall and were in a hallway. We went down a long tubular metallic corridor, and into Doctor Boni Lietencratz's combined laboratory and living quarters. We stepped into the latter first, the laboratory being on the floor below.

"How do you do, sir," I said, and stuck out my hand. The big handsome guy in a monkey-suit only looked at me, very coldly, and stood there. "That's a fine attitude," I said. "Snobbery."

"That isn't Doctor Lietencratz," Wakeman said. "That's a servant."

I turned. Lietencratz came running in, a little bouncing man with grey hair, a long beak and rosebud lips. He hopped around all the time and his hands moved constantly, nervously, in the air, over the surfaces of tables, chairs, the walls—like a couple of mice.

"This is Doctor Lietencratz. This is Marty Dunstall, ace salesman for Never-Fail Vacuum Cleaners—from the year 1951."

"What, what?" Lietencratz whispered. "You've used the—*time machine*?"

"I was desperate to sell those BUDGIES," Wakeman said. "And I figured that the psychological approach of that day might break down sales-resistance—I figured a representative from that period of super salesmanship would be able—"

"All right! All right! That's unimportant now!" Lietencratz looked haunted. His face was mottled, and his eyes were sunken. "The BUD-

GIES don't matter a great deal now. Ah—how about a drink, gentlemen?"

"Great," I said. I said I wanted a Scotch and soda, and Wakeman said he wanted a gin and bitters. I had hardly gotten my order out of my mouth, than the servant was there again, with the drinks tall and cool on a tray.

"Thank you, Morris," Lietencratz said. But I was staring at Morris' face. His eyes—they seemed about as friendly as two members of a Congressional Investigating Committee. No—not unfriendly exactly. Just—glassy—cold—

"Now what's all this scare business?" I said. "This robot salesman routine?"

Lietencratz bristled. "Please don't speak disdainfully of my robots!"

"You were the one who didn't seem happy about them," I said. "In that letter. I'm here to outsell Webster's. I'm here to sell BUDGIES—I'd better damn well sell BUDGIES! You can't tell me a bunch of cogs and wheels can outsell a sales-hep human!"

"Dunstall doubts the efficacy of your creations," Wakeman said.

My drink was gone. I started to make the fact known and there was Morris standing there with a renewal. I was startled. The servant's blank staring eyes gave me the creeps.

Lietencratz sighed. "Hard to tell, isn't it, Dunstall? But you see Morris is a robot."

"A what?" I said vaguely.

"A robotic, a synthetic man. Laboratories have been trying to develop them for centures, dreamed about them. In your time, Dunstall,

they had very elemental types of robotics. Plays, literature, all full of the concept. Surely you don't claim to be surprised . . ."

I figured Lietencratz was a real flip. Morris might have a screwy look . . . but I figured I could tell the difference between a human and a gadget. "Ah—it looks too human. HE looks too human," I corrected myself. "My idea of a robot—"

"Cogs and wheels," Lietencratz smiled wanly. "And X-ray eyes and all that nonsense. You wouldn't understand, Dunstall, the principle of these robots I've created. However, it's mainly an outgrowth of cybernetics, and advanced work in that field—proving that a human being and highly complex machinery differ only in complexity. I've finally succeeded in mechanically duplicating the human nervous system . . . to a degree, that is. But not in nearly so complex a form. And of course I can't give a robot a human's capacity for self-determination . . . or, let us say, a soul."

"Okay," I said. "So what's the big fuss all about? You made a bunch of super salesrobots, and sold them to Webster's. I still say that I can sell more BUDGIES than your robots."

"No," Lientencratz said in a hoarse whisper. "You can't. But selling BUDGIES, that isn't the thing that frightens me so much. They can sell ANYTHING. Ideas, for example. Ideas . . ."

I swallowed hard. I didn't know yet what he was driving at—but the way he had said that gave me a good solid case of the creeps.

I went over there and touched Morris' arm. The arm felt human. I

still wasn't exactly convinced. I let out a yell, though, as Lietencratz pulled something in the vicinity of Morris' neck and Morris' head raised a foot higher on a kind of telescopic spindle and began to twirl like a top.

I gulped the rest of my drink. Lietencratz pressed something else and then the robot's head dropped back down to normal and kept on looking at me.

"The reason," Lietencratz said, "why no human being can outsell these super salesrobots is that they're so highly and intricately specialized." He pointed at Morris. "Like this robot. I designed Morris to be the perfect servant. And no human being could possibly compete with it—as a servant."

Lietencratz wiped the sweat from his forehead and his hands that darted around in the air. "I built these robots for use . . . for the use of civilization as a whole . . . for strictly beneficent purposes, you see. With this goal in mind, I planned with great care. I incorporated in them all the known psychology of salesmanship. I figured that robots made into perfect salesrobots, specialized in convincing people, would be the most useful. It's easy, I thought, to present truths to people, but not so easy to sell them truths that would do them the most good."

Wakeman looked ill. "But why did you sell those five hundred robots to Webster's?"

"I needed money, financing. It took an awful lot of capital to build all those robots. And I knew that either Webster's or Herbert's would be interested, from a purely commercial motive. Later, I thought,

after the BUDGIES were sold, the robots could be used to sell more valuable educative things to the public. Ideas, for instance—but good, beneficial ideas! That was my error. It's fine to have agencies that can sell people anything. But the trouble is—they can sell the wrong things just as easily!"

"You mean this individual, Max Gaer," Wakeman said.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Lietencratz shouted, sounding like a hysterical housewife. "Working with him, working with those robots, I've had a chance to observe him. I don't know how he's escaped the re-conditioners. Yes, I do know. His important position with one of the biggest commercial enterprises in the world, in all of history. Anyway, gentlemen, I'll tell you what he is! A paranoiac, a power-mad fanatic, a man suffering from delusions of grandeur. A real fascoid personality, as they say, a recognition-hungry, obsessed individual!"

"It isn't Webster's that's bad, of course," Wakeman said, "nor the robots. It's Gaer and the use to which he will put the robots?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" said Lietencratz. "Those robots are perfect, perfect, I say! Super super salesrobots! They're built with a special tape insert so they can be conditioned to sell any objects or combination of objects, including ideas, concepts, which most people have learned to regard as THINGS. No human can resist them. They can break down any kind of conceivable sales-resistance. They operate on such a high mechanical certainty factor that it's impossible to resist them. They have a complete recorded pattern of approach

fitted to any possible variable in a human reaction pattern."

I said I needed another drink. I'd hardly gotten the words out before Morris, the perfect servant, was standing there with a fresh Scotch and soda.

"Perfect, perfect!" moaned Lietencratz. "A machine can't make a mistake. And these robots have learned all the rules in selling BUDGIES. Physically, they're designed for the greatest possible initial appeal to a potential customer. All, or most, of the customers to whom basic ideas must be sold in a feminine culture are, of course, women. So these robots have been designed to have the greatest sex appeal, physical presence, poise, charm—equipped for the perfect approach to housewives . . ."

Wakeman almost sobbed, his thinly papered nervous system breaking out all over like a red rash. "These robots—are really *that* good?"

"Perfect, perfect! But who sells the most BUDGIES won't make any difference! Can't you see? Selling the BUDGIES is just a blind for Gaer! They'll sell BUDGIES, certainly! Sweeping customers before them like a plague. But also, Gaer's conditioned those robots to sell IDEAS, you see, you see? He's got a dictator complex. And I happen to know that he's going to start selling people the idea that he's a sort of—ah—god!"

"You don't need robots to do that," I said. "Hitler—"

Wakeman yelled. "They're going out to sell in the morning!"

"I know, I know!" moaned Lietencratz.

"I still don't admit that these robots can sell better than I can," I

said. "But don't you have any more robots? We can send out robots too. Outsell Gaer's robots. Give me a little time with these robots. I'll whip 'em into shape. If Gaer's robots can sell anything, our robots can sell anything better!"

"We admire your attitude . . . characteristic of your age," Lietencratz sighed. "I have more robots, of course, a number of them which weren't completed when I sold those five hundred to Webster's. But they haven't been conditioned yet."

"Then let's condition them," I said. And I slapped Lietencratz on the back. He coughed. "I'll give them some ideas Gaer or you never heard of. I've got a personal little technique of my own. Now you take your initial approach to a dame. You work it the same way as if you were approaching one in a local bistro. You take the attitude that this broad—"

"Wait, wait, wait!" Lietencratz screamed. "Fools, idiot! You don't understand! Listen—I don't have five hundred robots left. Only about a hundred, maybe a few more. What if we did have some added trick so they could outsell Gaer's robots? We couldn't be that superior, even if we were superior at all! And besides, I haven't gotten the tape-spoils installed in them. I've been afraid—"

"Fear never gets you any place," I said. "Fear has no place in selling—"

The doors behind me burst open. Lietencratz screamed. Wakeman stepped to the wall and stood there. I stood right where I was. "Gaer—" Wakeman whispered.

Gaer was a bright kind of guy, if you know what I mean. Big and broad and bright, shaved down to a

gunmetal luster, brown and healthy from plenty of sun—there were no creases in his face and his dark hair glistened and he was redolent of masculine talc, and he glowed like grouped Martinis before breakfast.

His eyes, set close together and separated strikingly by a Roman nose, were bright too, bright and black and eager and—mad! Not outright crazy, but booby-hatch material right away. Sly—the smart, planning, scheming kind of flip. Like a fanatic who has made a success out of his own nuttiness.

And he had a coiled-and-complex-looking instrument aimed at all of us, and I was damn sure it wasn't a futuristic water-pistol.

It wasn't. "You gentlemen," he said, "will shut up and listen to me, and not cause any trouble. Otherwise, I'll burn all of you, and throw what's left of the three of you right straight down the garbage disposal unit."

One look at Lietencratz and Wakeman and I knew they believed what Gaer said. So did I. Lietencratz's face was crunched up like a squeezed half orange. His hands were still, hanging in the air on either side of the half orange. Wakeman looked tight and scratchy like the right string on a fiddle. My palms were cold like a subway wall.

"The three of you," Gaer said, "are going to stay right in this apartment until tomorrow night. Then it will be too late for you to do anything. I'm not taking any chances. You might think up something that would interfere with my plans."

"What are your plans?" Wakeman said.

"You won't approve," Gaer said.

He laughed. I shivered. His laughter sounded like the spilling of rotten fruit. "This social system is static, useless and dull. So I'm changing the whole thing, and I'm doing it in a day. Thought-control, gentlemen, I've got it. Thanks to Doctor Lietencratz here. He's told you about his robots, that are now my robots. At the risk of sounding melodramatic, gentlemen, I'm saying that I'm going to sell myself to the people, using Lietencratz's robots, as an absolute dictator, a god-man. And I'll soon have a social system that will make sense. Those robots will convince the people that our whole social system smells, that democracy smells, that I'd be the perfect dictator. Five-hundred robots operating twenty-four hours a day, five minutes at the most per person. It won't take long.

"And don't forget, those sold on the idea will help break down the resistance of the others! And then—it's all over! I'll rule the world. I'll have robots marching into the Kremlin and convincing Joe Stalin XII in five minutes that he's an inadequate ruler, and that he should hand the whole Politburo over to me!"

"Pal," I said. "You're as nutty as an almond bar. What you need is a quick one-way ride in a booby wagon—"

"Who is this obnoxious character?" Gaer said.

I would have jumped Gaer, but that ray gun, or whatever it was, was a lot more threatening than any kind of weapon I'd ever seen before.

"A friend of mine," Wakeman said. It was illegal to use the time-machine; then evidently Wakeman wanted to keep the facts about how I got into 350 A.B. a secret.

Gaer shrugged. "Well, the three of you are staying here. By tomorrow night my salesrobots will have sold practically the whole population of Mid-America, not only BUDGIES—but also a few other idea I want them to have."

"But those robots could have been such a wonderful benefit to mankind," whispered Lietencratz.

Gaer laughed. "You blue-nosed old hermit. Even the work you did on the BUDGIES—even those BUDGIES will help my plan, Lietencratz. They do everything for the home once they're installed. And they're channeled into Webster's Department Store. I'll make Webster's my headquarters, and I'll have those BUDGIES fixed so they'll deliver things I want delivered. Between the BUDGIES that furnish everybody with everything from my headquarters forever, and the robots that can sell anyone anything—I'll have a perfect setup, gentlemen, believe me."

He took a few steps forward. "Now I'm going to lock the three of you up in this closet. Then I'll set the automatic doorman to 'do not disturb,' and that's good, as you perhaps know, for at least twelve hours."

"Why don't you call the cops—ah—enforcers of the law?" I asked.

Lietencratz groaned. "For what? They couldn't touch one of those robots. I imagine Mr. Gaer has taken care of that."

"Yes indeed," Gaer said. "Special tapes for each robot, conditioned to sell one very special idea to any Peace Guard they meet for five minutes the idea that I'm the boss."

So then Gaer started herding us into the closet. It wasn't a large closet, and the whole idea of being

crammed in that hole for twelve hours was hard to take. And it also meant that Webster's and Gaer and the robots would win the BUDGIE selling race, and something else that was beginning to scare me—even though it wasn't my age. And I was here to prevent Webster's from winning the BUDGIE selling race—or else. With my choice of any gadget I wanted to take back to 1951 with me if I won—and the very unpleasant prospect of staying in 350 A.B. if I lost—I was suddenly very determined to beat Websters and especially Gaer, a gentleman to whom I'd taken an immediate dislike. If ever I'd met a real shmo, it was Gaer.

I heard a sound in the kitchen, a very light sound that Gaer didn't hear. I had an idea.

Casually I said to Lietencratz. "Why don't you call Mr. Morris?"

"What? What?" Lietencratz said.

"The perfect servant," I said, while Gaer kept on herding us across the room toward the closet. "Mr. Gaer doesn't look too happy here as a guest. And if Morris is a perfect servant, he would be bound to want to make Mr. Gaer more comfortable."

Lietencratz made a peeping sound like a happy little bird. "Morris," he said. "Oh, Morris."

"What—who are you calling?" Gaer yelled.

Morris stood in the doorway, politely. Gaer twisted toward him. There were four of us now, and Gaer had to cover three sides of the room at once. I said: "Gaer's tired. He's a guest of yours, Lietencratz, and he's tired!"

"What are you talking about?" yelled Gaer.

Morris took a few tentative steps

toward Gaer. Lietencratz said, "Morris! Our good guest, Mr. Gaer, is tired. Mr. Gaer should be treated right Morris, and he's tired—"

Gaer made a gesture with the gun. I gave that table suspended from the ceiling with silver wires a big shove, and one corner of it caught Gaer right in the solar plexus. Gaer windmilled across the room, trying to get a line on somebody with that superman pistol, and all the time Lietencratz was hopping around, screaming, "Morris—treat Gaer right. Better put him to bed. See that he gets a nice long rest—"

Gaer was crawling on the floor trying to get his breath back as Morris went for him, saying, "Yes, sir, yes, sir." A very polite gadget, that Morris.

Gaer was getting to his feet and I threw a chair. It caught the pistol arm, swung the weapon around, and then Morris had him. I ran in from the back and twisted the weapon out of Gaer's hand. And all the time Morris was gathering Gaer in his arms, crooning to him.

Gaer was big and tough, and he had that added strength of fanaticism. Maybe Gaer wasn't really so crazy. In 1951 he wouldn't be considered crazy, I thought. I never did find out, but I have an idea that in 350 A.B. there were plenty of guys like Gaer—only in an age that's so smoothly run with machines whirling everywhere, it's hard for a guy like that to express himself, to really make his beliefs known.

Anyway, he was plenty tough. He bent forward and I felt myself doing an awkward ballet leap right into the wall, and from there I bounced to the floor. Gaer managed to get a

drop-kick in, using my head for a football. Morris was crooning and trying to get a good solid hold on Gaer. Lietencratz was hopping up and down and yelling suggestions to Morris as to how he could best display his best servant qualities. Wakeman got the lead out and charged in to help, and Gaer landed the best haymaker I've ever seen on Wakeman's glass chin.

Wakeman folded like an old rusty hinge and stretched out on the deck like a guy who hadn't had any sleep for a week.

But by then Morris, the perfect servant, had things well in both his capable hands. Lietencratz was saying, "Put him to bed, Morris. He needs rest. See that he stays in bed and gets a good rest."

"Yes, sir," said Morris.

"Why you—" Gaer shouted, but that was all. Morris was squeezing him pretty tight.

"That's right," said Lietencratz. "Don't hurt him now, Morris. He'll resist. But you put him to bed. It's for his own good. His own good."

"Yes, sir," said Morris. He had Gaer off the floor and cradled in his arms like a baby. "Please, sir, you need a long rest, Mr. Gaer. I'm going to put you to bed. It's for your own good you know, sir."

Gaer was screaming and shrieking as Morris got Gaer hoisted just right and carted toward the bedroom. Gaer's arms waved crazily. His face was gargoyle-medicine red. "Now, now, sir," I could hear Morris saying politely. "Just be quiet while I get your shoes off. You must rest. I'll give you a sedative, sir—"

"Let's get out of here," said Lie-

tencratz frantically. "Get below and see what we can do about those other robots of mine."

"What about Wakeman?" I said. "I'll take him along." I lifted Wakeman, threw him over my shoulder, and we went down in an elevator to Lietencratz's lab on the floor below. By then, Wakeman was stirring a little and I propped him up against a wall.

"There are the rest of my robots," Lietencratz said. "Only a hundred of them. Even if they sold BUDGIES twice as fast as Gaer's robots, Gaer would still get to most of the population first. Nothing we can do, I tell you, nothing! Democracy, freedom, everything gone—"

"We've got Gaer up there—" I began.

"Yes, but he won't be there long. We can't use violence any more."

"We could bump him off," I said, "and bury him somewhere. No one would ever know—"

Lietencratz was staring at me with eyes bulging so far the draft in the room was drying them off. His lips twitched and for a minute I thought he was going to pass out. "You would—kill him?"

I shrugged. I hadn't really meant it, I guess now, but on the other hand, a guy like Gaer was a very dangerous fellow. "What else?" I said.

"There's got to be some other way," Wakeman said. He looked straight at me. "And you're the man to find a way out, Dunstall. Back in your time, you fellows had a certain intensity and a way of short-cutting circumstances. You could sell things that it now seems incredible anyone could have been persuaded to buy.

You can figure a way out of this, Dunstall, if any one can. And someone has to."

He didn't add the rest of it—that either I came up with something, or I remained in 350 A.B. Maybe nobody would realize what a lousy prospect that was, without being there. Where there's very little that's familiar, and people and machines are all mixed up so that you have trouble telling the difference, and everybody's about ready to be plugged in, along with a BUDGIE, to a big department store for the rest of their lives—brother, I wanted out of 350 A.B., and I wanted out of it fast!

And all the time I was staring at those robots of Lietencratz's. Dames," I heard myself whispering. "Beautiful broads, all of them—"

I looked at Lietencratz. "They're all women," I said. I had a peculiar sensation in my stomach. All hundred of them seemed a kind of perfect blend of Betty Grable and June Allison and Jane Russell or—pick any other three you want. These hundred robots had everything.

Then I got the creeps. They were all looking at me, all hundred of them, sitting demurely in rows. All looking at me with—dead, dead eyes.

"YES, YES!" Lietencratz was saying. "The others, the ones I sold to Webster's, they're all male robots—I mean their surface appearance is male. They're all sexless, of course."

Somewhere in the bottom of my alleged brain, clickings and whirrings were occurring, but right then I just had one devil of a headache.

"We've got to work fast," Lietencratz said. "We've got to condition these robots to sell. We've got to con-

dition these robots to sell. We've got about eight hours left. Gaer's robots will be out selling in the morning—BUDDGIES and the IDEAS that go with them."

"And even if Gaer's still imprisoned upstairs," Wakeman said, "the robots will be out selling anyway. Nobody else over there knows what Gaer's really up to. If Gaer doesn't show up in the morning, his robots will be sent out anyway. I'm sure that's all been arranged."

"But we've already agreed," I said, "that we don't have enough robots here to compete with Gaer's robots. Even if our robots sold twice as much."

"That is so unfortunately correct," Wakeman said.

"But we have to do something," Lietencratz said. "At least we can try. Everyone these robots sells a BUDGIE to, they'll at least be free of the influences that Gaer's robots will sell to everyone else. We'll have a small resistant minority group, the core of a resistance organization that could fight against Gaer's dictatorship—"

"But that would be squelched damn soon," I said. I kept looking at those robots, those luscious formations of feminine pulchritude—"And anyway," I said, "these robots are all feminine robots. They'd have to sell to housewives. If I know anything about salesmanship, these women couldn't sell very many other women BUDGIES, or anything else, I don't care how you condition them."

"Maybe you're right there," Lietencratz said.

"Why did you make these robots look like women?" I asked.

"I thought it would be logical. I

made five hundred that resembled men. I thought I'd make five hundred more to resemble women. I thought it would be a well-balanced procedure—"

"Yeah," I whispered. "It might at that . . . it might at that . . ."

Lietencratz was scurrying around some big filing cabinets, throwing spools of wire and tape out over the floor. "Hurry, hurry!" he was chirping. "Help me! We've got to insert these tapes and wires. They'll fix up these robots like Gaer's robots. So they can sell anything, to anybody, within five minutes."

"Don't be a sap," I said. "We've already agreed that won't work. This minority resistance business, that's just failure with a neat excuse hooked on. The idea is to stop Gaer's robots. Stopping Gaer won't work, even if we could. We've got to stop his robots."

"Impossible, impossible!" moaned Lietencratz.

"I'm afraid he's right," Wakeman whispered. "It looks like the end—and even you can't figure a way out of this, Dunstall. Which, I might add, is too bad for you. The conditions still exist for you. I haven't gone to all the trouble to bring you here, risking arrest and other indignities, for nothing, Dunstall. There isn't any way out of this hideous situation—but you've got to find a way out!"

I went over to Wakeman. "Listen, pal, I didn't ask to come here. And neither would anyone else, if they knew what kind of set-up it was. You're probably desperate, so I'll excuse your lousy behavior. You're acting more of a shmo the Gaer is, but

I can see the spot you're in. Okay—I think I've got a way out."

"What, what?" Lietencratz said, and he stopped throwing spools of tape and wire over the floor and looked up at me.

"It's a long shot, but it might work. But we've got to record some stuff on some other tape. Vocal stuff, that's all. No brain work. Get a dame somewhere and let's get stuff recorded. Can we do that in the next eight hours?"

"Do what?" Wakeman said.

"Get a dame with a nice but emphatic voice. We'll record a few lines, that's all we'll need. Also, we'll need a sales-area map. I want to know the sales routes these robots of Gaer's will probably follow. Also we've got to find vacant apartments and houses in these areas, you understand, men?"

Wakeman nodded without enthusiasm. Lietencratz nodded as though he were being forced to agree with a moron.

"Fine," I said. "Now get a girl in here to record a few lines. Lietencratz, are these robots capable of moving around, acting like human beings now, or do we have to fix them up so they'll do that too?"

"We have standard spools for that," Lietencratz said. "That can be inserted in a few minutes."

"Then let's get started," I said. "And let's work fast. I want to get out of this lousy year."

This was it. Everything was set. Everything had been taken care of the way I wanted it. If it didn't work, Wakeman wouldn't be out anything but his job, his reputation and—depending on what the new Dictator,

Gaer, thought of him—his life. And I wouldn't be out anything but the privilege of living out my life back in the twentieth century where I belonged, and with a gadget from the year 350 A.B.

It hadn't been easy. I was a wreck, my nerves were as scratchy as the last string on a violin, and my face was something strickly to frighten goblins.

We'd had to find a bunch of vacant houses and apartments, and that hadn't been easy. We'd found a few. We'd made up the rest by taking over houses and apartments left temporarily vacant by vacationers, some others being renovated, and so forth.

It was morning and my little communication device that Wakeman had given me, and with which I could keep in touch with Wakeman and Lietencratz, told me that already Gaer's robots were on the march. They could sell anybody anything in five minutes. First they would unload a BUDGIE; then, in another five minutes, they would unload the IDEA that Gaer was a god, a dictator, the big boss of a new and greater social order.

I waited. And out there at the front door, one of Lietencratz's beautiful female robots waited. We'd given each of Lietencratz's robots a name and posted it in the regular places on whichever apartment or house we had taken over.

To check on results of my plan, Lietencratz stayed with one of his robots in one of the other sales sectors, and Wakeman with one in another sector, and I was here with a robot in this sector. We had a robot station in each sector, making each

of the hundred sales areas covered by one of our robots. That meant that each one of our robots would have to take care of a hundred of Gaer's robots.

I hid behind the door and waited, and the robot I was with stood by the front door waiting for the doorbell to announce the approach of one of Gaer's super salesrobots.

So that's the way it was. Me waiting. And the robot waiting at the front door. All over Mid-America, which wasn't very big any more, I'd been led to understand, were the five hundred robots of Gaer's. Robots that could sell anybody anything. It gave me goose-pimples, thinking about it.

I'd never thought good healthy salesmanship could come to this.

And also it was hard for me to keep on believing that this beautiful housewifely looking creation was actually a robot. There was never a better looking, better stacked brunette anywhere, any time. It stood there demurely in its crisp, fresh, domestic housewife's uniform, like millions of other housewives in Mid-America. Only this one wasn't the same at all.

I'd figured everything out all right. Top-notch salesmanship depends on deep psychological factors. A good salesman may not know these things consciously, but he knows them. Most sales are made to women. And most of the sales to women are made by men. And underneath it all is the basic psychological inability of women to say "no".

I'd fixed that.

My nerves were jumpy. Tension mounted as I waited. My stomach

was turning flim-flams. Everywhere, in every selling area, Gaer's robots would be selling like mad, one customer every five minutes or less. It was about ten o'clock already. My plan depended on only a small percentage of the population being sold by Gaer's robots before—

I leaned forward. The doorbell was ringing. My robot straightened her hair, smoothed her dress down over her phony hips and, in a most feminine gesture, it opened the door.

One of Gaer's handsome sales robots stood there. "I represent—" Gaer's robot began . . .

"I don't want anything," said Lietencratz's robot.

"That's it, kid," I whispered. Sweat ran down my face.

Behind Gaer's robot I saw a truck containing BUDGIES ready to install. Huge complex machines covered with dials, indicators, needles. Everywhere one of those monsters was plugged in, people were being plugged into a department store for life.

"You look very fresh and charming this morning, Mrs. Latenbach," said Gaer's robot. Its smile flashed and it started to put its foot inside the door. But my female robot didn't budge. "I told you," it said, "that I don't want to buy anything."

"Of course not," said Gaer's robot in its most charming manner. "That's why I'm here to point out the reasons why you should buy from me, and also to tell you something about my sales manager, Mr. Max Gaer. I represent Webster's Department Store. And I'm selling the BUDGIE about which you have undoubtedly heard a great deal. I

understand your antagonism toward buying. But the BUDGIE will take care of all your buying from now on. You'll never have to worry again about shopping, budgeting, meal-planning, cooking or serving. Webster's BUDGIE does everything for your home and your family. It does everything for the rest of your life—Now—"

I'd like to explain that pitch. All I can say is that Lietencratz was right. That robot COULD sell anyone anything. All the subtle things about selling that even psychologists can't explain, that robot had. I was scared, plenty scared. It could sell a BUDGIE to anyone, and it could sell Gaer to anyone. And with Gaer, went ideas no one should ever buy.

The pitch gained momentum. The pitch that would sell anything to anybody. The spiel salesmen, including yours truly, have always dreamed of. The irresistible pitch. The only thing was, this customer wasn't human.

And during each planned pause in the salesrobot's speech, my robot would say, "I don't want a BUDGIE."

I stared. Something was happening to Gaer's robot. Its words were faltering. Its poise was slipping. Its pitch was garbling.

"You tell 'em, kid," I was whispering over and over.

Finally Gaer's robot seemed to droop a little. It whispered in a kind of rising inflection that became a whine. "But, Mrs. Latenbach, you GOT to want a BUDGIE!"

"I don't want a BUDGIE," said my wonderful little brunette robot. "I don't want to buy a BUDGIE. I don't want to buy anything."

"But you should—"

"I don't want a BUDGIE."

"But—"

"I don't want a BUDGIE."

"Eeeeeeee—ahhhhhhhh!" screamed the perfect salesman. And right there, in front of me, the perfect salesman, the robot that could sell anything to any one within five minutes, flipped its metal cork.

It shook and trembled and quivered. Smoke curled out of its mouth that flapped loosely in a garbled, nonsensical outburst of meaningless speech to the effect that no one should be without a Webster BUDGIE, that Mr. Gaer was a god, and other things.

Then it fell to its knees and began to cry like a baby; then it stretched out and stared up at the sky, its mouth gaped open, its fingers extended.

I got Wakeman on the commuter strapped to my wrist. "It works, it works!" I yelled. "How's it going in your sector?"

"Perfect, wonderful!" Wakeman was yelling back at me. "This super salesrobot went berserk and ran away down the street, tearing itself to pieces, throwing pieces of itself in all directions!"

I contacted Lietencratz. It was the same there. Lietencratz was out of his head with ecstasy. "Saved, saved!" he was shouting. "Our democratic society is saved!"

"Now let's get our cute little trick robots over to another sector, and fast," I said. "We've got a lot of sales-robots to eliminate yet."

So that's what we did. By mid-afternoon, with about a third of the population having bought BUDGIES

and Gaer as a god and a dictator, we had driven all the five hundred sales-robots as nutty as so many machine-tooled fruitcakes.

According to Lietencratz, the psychologists would take care of that temporarily insane third of the population that had bought Gaer. After a while, seeing that no one else was buying this crazy idea, the fanatical one third would gradually loose the force of the robots' powerful sales-talks.

Gaer flipped too, when he saw what had happened to his big deal. The last I heard of Gaer, they had put him through some sort of reconditioning process, and he came out of it anything but a guy with a dictator complex. He became an elevator operator at the Herbert's department store, and all he ever said was, "Floor please?" and "Yes, sir." or "No sir." I saw him once before I got the hell out of that place and time. And, so help me, he looked just like one of Lietencratz's robots!

Anyway, I'd done my bit for Webster's, for Lietencratz and for Wakeman. So they bid me a fond and grateful farewell, which I did not return in kind, and sent me back to my own time, back to 1951.

I think I was pretty smart about my choice of a gadget. Not something so fantastic and complex to the civilization of 1951 as to be wholly impractical. It's simple, but something people will accept to the tune of a few million bucks for Marty Dunstall.

No, I'm not telling you what it is. I haven't gotten it patented yet. But you'll find out. It'll revolutionize this country overnight, and things will

(Continued on page 142



THE FRIGHTENED PLANET

SIDNEY AUSTEN

Illustrated J. Allen St. John

Karn was savage and primitive—a lusty Cro-Magnon—but above all he was a man and the people of Mahlo had problems which only a man could solve!



Against the blackness of the early morning sky the huge ball traced an arc of flame. Had Karn been watching the sky he would have seen the ball slow in its descent and then come to a landing some distance ahead of him. But he was too busy for that.

On the back of his neck the short hairs told him that pursuit was still close behind. He put on a fresh burst of speed, his bare feet making no sound on the trail he followed. Soon the early breeze would shift and they would lose his scent.

Until then he was in danger from the males of Tur's tribe. Tur the coward, Karn thought. Tur the bully. Tur the leader of the tribe. Tur had never liked Karn. He had liked him even less as he grew into magnificent Cro-Magnon manhood. Karn represented the challenge that must come to every leader sooner or later.

Then the wind shifted and Karn slowed. They'd give him up now. He was certain of that. But what to do next? He was all alone, an outcast from his tribe. For a full-grown man to find another tribe was impossible.

Still, he wasn't sorry about the fight. It had been a good one. Tur was still in his prime. He'd used his teeth and his feet and every trick he knew. He wasn't quite as strong as Karn, nor as fast, but he'd had the advantage of experience.

Only one thing Tur lacked, in common with the other members of the tribe, and it was that which had lost him the fight. He had almost no inventiveness. For Karn's questing mind Tur hated him. He could not understand a man who found in-

terest in new situations. And what Tur could not understand he hated.

So they had fought. For a while Tur held the upper hand. He had met every rush of Karn's and repulsed it. But Karn had noticed that every attack from Tur's left was met by a singular twist of the chief's body.

Once Tur twisted. Twice; a third time; and a fourth time he swung around. The fifth time Karn was not there. He'd stopped himself in midstride, reversed himself and caught Tur off balance. Then steel fingers had fastened on Tur's throat in unshakable tenacity.

That was when the other males had charged to his rescue. Tur, they hated. But Karn they hated more. Karn made up his mind quickly. Glat alone he could have torn limb from limb. Waan alone would have fared no better. But they and the others together represented for him a quick and certain death.

Then it had been run, run, run. Run with all of them after him. Run into the forest in the night. Only the giant wolf and the saber-tooth there. But they were not half so deadly as his own blood relatives.

Now the chase was over. Karn paused, his chest heaving. In a few minutes his breathing was back to normal. It didn't take this man long to recover. Karn grinned into the darkness. It would take Tur longer. He'd wear those welts on his throat for a while.

Karn shrugged and sniffed the night air. Better move ahead. No smell of the big cats. But there was a nest of wolves off to his right. They slept now, but soon they'd be awake.

Up ahead there was a strange scent, one he didn't recognize.

Should he go on or turn aside? Ahead there was a glade where a spring bubbled. Small animals came to drink there in the morning. That meant food and water to a man who needed both. Karn moved ahead, but warily.

The rising sun found him only a short distance from his objective. Now there were mingled sounds as the forest came awake. Early-opening flowers filled the air with fresh sweetness. It was good to be alive.

Then, through a thin screen of trees, Karn saw the great ball. It almost filled the glade, reached nearly to the height of the trees. Gleaming gray-green it was, like the eyes of the wolf. The association made Karn pause. He drifted off to one side, picked a likely tree and hauled himself up into its lower branches.

Patience Karn had. He sat immobile, watchful. From inside this strange orb came sounds that were not too faint for Karn's keen hearing. An hour passed; two hours. Nothing happened. Still he crouched, waiting.

His patience was rewarded. An opening appeared in the ball. There was a puff of air being released from pressure. A figure stepped through the opening and onto the earth. Another figure followed. What were they?

They were men! Clad in strange garments that covered them tightly, they walked upright on two legs. But what puny men!

Half Karn's size they were, and hairless. Through their skin-tight

garments the bones of their narrow chests were visible. Their delicate fingers hovered at their waists over over small sticks. The scent of fear was on them.

Karn's nose wrinkled in disgust. No danger here. Then a third figure stepped out into the light and Karn's flagging interest reawakened. This scent he recognized. This was a woman!

She was taller than the men and her garment clung tight to a rounded figure that brought a gleam to Karn's eyes. This one had hair, thicker than Karn's own. Her features were more delicate than those of the women he had known, but somehow more pleasing.

He realized that the three were speaking. Their mouths did not move, there was no sound. Yet they spoke. Karn could hear the voices inside his head. Somehow he understood.

"What a place to land," the woman said.

"Couldn't be helped, one of the men replied. "At least it has air. Once the tanks are full we'll be on our way again. In a minute or two I'll test that liquid to see if we can drink it."

"Must you test everything? It looks all right. And why must we stand so close to the ship?"

"Because we don't know what sort of place we've landed in," the second man said.

"There's only one way to find out," she told him. "By moving around."

Her tone was openly contemptuous. Karn found himself agreeing with her. These men were spineless. They must be so to let a

woman talk to them like this. Listen to the way they bickered. Like three women over a piece of meat that had fallen from the cave fire.

Karn's nose twitched. What was wrong with these people? While they argued senselessly among themselves their lives hung in the balance. Couldn't they smell the gray wolf that was creeping toward them?

The three stood almost below Karn and jabbered back and forth. And not twenty feet away gray-green eyes watched them intently. Karn saw the wolf's haunches lower. In a moment three hundred and fifty pounds of carnivore would launch itself upon them.

Claws would rip their flesh, flashing fangs rend and tear them. Karn was quite objective as he thought about it. They didn't have a chance.

A roar split the air. Karn had known it was coming. But the three below were taken completely by surprise. Fear rooted them and froze them into immobility. Crouching, Karn watched death come hurtling toward them.

But after all, they *were* his own kind.

Karn met the wolf in mid-leap. No tiger could have made the leap more surely than he. His plummeting weight landed squarely athwart the beast's back, breaking short the trajectory of its bound.

Together they crashed to earth. Karn's legs encircled the wolf's middle with the strength of a python. Steel fingers found its throat.

Claws raked at Karn's thighs, slavering fangs sought his hands. He

retaliated in kind. His own teeth were at the wolf's jugular. The animal rolled, taking Karn along with him, but the man would not loose his grip.

Bestial growls rumbled from two chests. Dust-covered and splattered with gore, they fought across the glade. Karn's legs tightened inexorably and the wolf's growl became an anguished squeal.

It could not shake the thing that clung to its back. Slowly, surely, its ribs were forced inward until they cracked. Then jagged ends dug at its lungs, its heart. There was a gush of blood from its nostrils. It lay still.

Karn spat out the salt sweat that ran into his mouth and wiped it from his eyes. Slowly he rose and shook the tension from his leg muscles. Blood dripped from a shallow gash in his thigh but that concerned him little. He had suffered worse in the past.

For the duration of the fight he had forgotten completely the two men and the woman. Now, turning, he saw them watching him. Fear clouded the eyes of the men, but in the woman's gaze he read awed admiration.

Karn gestured, a motion meant to show peaceful intentions. His move was misinterpreted, and as he came toward the three the men reached for the little sticks that hung at their waists. Frantically they waved them at him.

Were they trying to frighten him with those things? Anger flushed Karn's face and a low growl issued from his throat. One blow from each of his hands and these puny men would be dead. The woman he liked.

But the sticks had stopped waving. They were pointing directly at him. He was caught suddenly in the grip of a force that held him helpless. Muscles stood out on his neck like tree roots, but he could not move.

Inside his head Karn heard the woman arguing again with her two companions.

"A fine way to treat someone who's just saved our lives!"

"But he might be dangerous. You saw what he did to that beast. Look at the size of him. One twist of those hands and he'd tear our heads off our shoulders."

"He is a powerful brute, isn't he?" But there was no fear in her voice. Only admiration.

"Worse than a Green One," agreed the second of the hairless ones. "We'd better get back into the ship."

They were a little slow about that, Karn thought. In the underbrush close by he had heard the movements of a heavy body. A saber-tooth had no need for stealth. And it was coming their way.

"He's trying to tell us something," the woman was saying. "He may be trying to warn us. Turn off those rays."

The men hesitated. Then their fingers moved slightly, and Karn was free to move.

But now there was no time for warnings. Karn gestured over his shoulder and started for the opening in the huge ball. He sensed that safety lay inside. Behind him a huge cat snarled.

The hairless ones hesitated no longer. Leaving the woman to her own devices they dashed for the ship. She turned to run, tripped and

fell. Karn scooped her up as he ran.

Almost together, the four reached the ship. The smell of the saber-tooth was strong in Karn's nostrils; he could almost feel its breath on his neck as he dashed up a ramp.

One of the men was fumbling with a lever. The ramp swung up; the opening in the ship's side vanished. Against the gray-green wall the tiger's body thudded.

That danger now behind them, the two men were pointing their sticks at Karn again. But this time the woman halted them before they paralyzed him.

"That's twice he's saved our lives. How much more proof do we need that he's friendly?" She smiled at Karn. "Who are you?"

"Karn, of the tribe of Tur."

"I am Andra, and these men are Harus and Ven. We are of Mahlo. We thank you for saving our lives."

Harus was the smaller of the two men. His face was thin, pinched with perpetual fear. Ven too seemed always frightened. They stared at Karn doubtfully.

"What are we going to do with him?" Harus asked.

"Maybe we could take him back to his tribe," Andra suggested. "If it's very far we could save him a long trip."

Her eyes questioned Karn. He shook his head.

"No. They would kill me."

"Somewhere else, then?"

Karn shrugged. A full-grown male was no welcome guest in any tribe. Andra read his thoughts and was sympathetic.

"You're really up against it, aren't you? From what we've seen of your

world so far I would guess it was no place for a man without friends."

"I will go with you to your people; to Mahlo, wherever that is."

"What a notion." Harus snorted. "Picture this uncouth thing in his wolf skin on Mahlo! Besides" and the disdain went out of his voice, "we'd be doing him no favor."

Karn grunted. They didn't think much of him. But there was more to it than that. The three of them had fallen to arguing again. There was talk of Mahlo and the Green Ones, whoever *they* were. The argument droned on endlessly.

"Too much talk," Karn said abruptly.

The talk stopped. Andra was looking at Karn, a slow smile spreading across her face. Her breasts rose and fell with a change in her breathing and Karn felt a warm flush rise within him.

"I think Karn is right," she said. "Too much talk."

Somewhere in the bowels of the ship a great beast purred. I should not have let them strap me down, Karn thought. The purring grew louder, the ship lifted.

His back pressed against the seat and there was a crushing weight on his chest. His insides tied themselves in knots. What was happening to him. What invisible monster held him in its clutch?

"Afraid?" Andra asked.

Karn was aware that the weight was off his chest. The purring was muffled. They had the beast penned. Then Andra unfastened the thongs that bound Karn.

"Why should Karn be afraid?" he smiled scornfully.

"Perhaps now you would rather remain in your own world. There may be danger on Mahlo."

This woman was a fool. Naturally; she was a woman. What was danger to Karn? What was danger to a man who had lived his life with Tur and the bull males of the tribe, who roamed the same jungle with the sabertooth and the great wolf?

Yet she was a woman, and one who attracted him. Karn reached out and drew her to him. Let her feel the might of his arms. She was doing something strange with her lips, pressing them against his.

"Now let me go," she said. Then, sharply, "Let me go!"

Bewildered, Karn released his grip. He was confused by this creature of moods. One moment she smiled and the next moment she seemed angry. He wanted to please her. But how?

"Well, we're all right," Ven said. He came from some other chamber in the great ship. "We're running free now. At the next force field we'll cut into Mahlo's orbit."

There was more strange talk which Karn did not understand. More debate, too. It seemed that these men spent half their time arguing with the woman.

Apparently the men held the supremacy, but a very shaky one. The woman seemed not to know too much about this ship. But she had a good deal to say nevertheless.

Then Harus' voice came out of nowhere. "Better strap in again. We've hit Mahlo's orbit."

Again there was the awful pressure, the crushing weight. Violent forces shook the ship. Andra

moaned softly. Strange words issued from her lips. Then they were out of the clutch of the awful force.

"Landing at Nobla," Ven said. Panels slid away and Karn could see through the walls of the ship.

Below them was a city. They dropped toward it and its gargoyle-topped towers reached up to meet them. Strange birds winged across an azure sky. They came down over the city and landed gently in a meadow next to the mouth of a great cavern. "nobody around," Ven said. "I don't understand it."

"They weren't expecting us to land at Nobla," Andra said. "You're always worrying about something. Come on, let's get out."

The ramp came down and the four descended, Harus leading the way. Karn wondered why they moved so warily. This was their own land. What were they afraid of?

To one side the mouth of the cavern yawned dark and forbidding as they went toward it. Andra explained to Karn that it was the mouth of a tunnel which led to the city proper. There were walls about the city which were never opened.

They were almost to the tunnel when the green things came at them. Slimy beings, as tall as Harus and Ven, covered with green scales and four-armed, more lizards than men, they poured from the tunnel.

Emitting bird-like cries they swarmed forward, long spears pointing ahead at waist level. With a scream of fear, Ven spun around and ran. Andra and Harus stood petrified.

Their reactions were typical, apparently, for the Green Ones came

on as though used to encountering little resistance. Even the sight of Karn, huge of frame and heavy-thewed, draped in his wolfskin, failed to register. It was a fatal mistake.

"The men of Mahlo have never had to fight. There was no danger here. So they spent their time in idle chatter, in philosophy, in the invention of luxuries. But they retained control of the government. When the Green Ones came out of the forests of the south and began their conquering march, our men decreed that we must retreat before them.

"When only Nobla and Luma remained to us, the men decreed that we must retreat from Mahlo to a world without dangers. Unfortunately there is no such place."

Karn thought for a moment. "What about the Green Ones?"

"They are more reptile than human, as you saw. But they do have a rudimentary intelligence. Added to their instinct for aggression it is sufficient to destroy us. Wait until you see our Council in session. You won't wonder then."

Luma had turned out en masse to welcome Andra and her two companions. Karn had been the center of attraction and interest for a few minutes. But it was the report of the three Mahloans which mattered most.

Andra gave it to them straight. There was no hope elsewhere. The Green Ones were only minor terrors among the blood-lusting creatures the Universe had spawned. Unless the men of Mahlo fought back they were doomed.

Yet Karn saw no sign that a fight

was even imaginable. Shoulders sagged, heads dropped in resignation, but that was all. As he and his three companions walked with the throng to the Council forum, Karn saw brows knit in contemplation, none in anger.

There were as many women as men in the great hall of assembly. They cast no votes, but they had plenty to say.

"We might consider retreating to the northern deserts," Ven said after he had called the meeting to order.

The women shouted him down. What it was that the women wanted, Karn could not guess. But the men quailed before them and became confused. The most important assembly in Mahlo's history was going to break up with nothing done.

"We can only wait, then," Ven said regretfully. A chorus of assent rose like a dirge.

It was all Karn could take. For himself death was nothing. All his life had been lived in its shadow. But that Andra should fall into the hands of the Green Ones was another thing. And that these men should allow their women to meet similar fates filled him with contempt.

"You can do something!" he shouted, coming to his feet. "You can fight!"

Beside him Andra pulled at his arm.

"But we don't know how. No Mahloan has ever lifted his hand in anger. Don't you see?"

The rest of the women were shrilling the same sentiments, drowning out the men. Listening to them, Karn began to understand a great

deal. But it was not time for that now.

"Be silent!" he roared. "I see only that you are all going to die. At least die like men!"

The women's voices shrilled in his ears but he shouted them down. By sheer lung power he silenced them, and the sight of his giant figure awed them and kept them silent.

"I am going to pick one hundred of the men," Karn told them. "With nothing but pointed sticks and clubs they are going to follow me. And they are going to fight! Do you hear? They are going to fight!"

Darkness held no terrors for Karn. His eyes were sharp, his hearing as acute as a bird's, his sense of smell infallible. Beyond Nobla's wall he caught the scent of the Green Ones, foul and slightly acrid.

He had to move fast. The men of Mahlo were not as well equipped as he. They had to have light to find their way around. And in an hour the sun would be up.

Karn moved away from the gates, edged along the high wall until he found a rough section. His fingers sought crevices. Then, with the agility of a monkey, he made his way upward. At the top of the wall he waited, listening to the sounds of deep breathing on his right and below.

Rage welled up within Karn. The thought of Andra in the clutches of these slimy things sent the blood roaring through him.

"They will not get you," he said.

"No? After Luma there won't be any place to retreat. The voyage that Harus and Ven and I have just made was in search of another world

where we might be safe. But the others are as dangerous as Mahlo."

Karn reflected that a people who could not fight these Green Ones had little hope of survival among the Turs and the beasts of his own world. Compared to the great wolves and the saber-tooths the Green Ones were nothing.

"We will kill the Green Ones," he decided aloud. "We will fight them and destroy them."

"Don't make me laugh," Andra said. "You've seen our men when they were in danger."

The ship had lifted and was leaving Nobla behind. Watching the horizon ahead, Karn saw another city come into view within a short time. It looked exactly like Nobla. They must be a great people who could build cities like these, who could make ships that flew through the air.

But they could hardly be called men. What sort of man was it who did not have even the instinct for self preservation? What sort was it who would not defend his woman? Andra read Karn's thoughts.

"What kind of men?" she said. "I'll tell you. They never built the cities of Mahlo. Those have stood for thousands of generations, erected by some forgotten ancestors."

As the first of the Green Ones reached him, Karn side-stepped nimbly, sweeping the spear aside and tearing it from its bearer's grasp. Karn's other hand shot out and connected with a snout. The man-lizard dropped, its face turned to green and oozing pulp.

In Karn's hands the spear became a club. The Green Ones turned

toward him in a body, trying to fend off this unexpected attack. They were met by a whirling staff that crushed whatever it hit. Karn's power was overwhelming. His rush cut a swath of death through the green ranks, forcing them back.

He heard Andra calling and looked back over his shoulder. She was standing at the opening in the ship, screaming to him. In their blind fear. Harus and Ven were prepared to take off and leave him behind.

No saber-tooth could have altered the direction of his charge more quickly than Karn. Before the Green Ones could even attempt to block his retreat, Karn was through them and past them.

Harus and Ven sprawled in their flight chairs, panting as though it were they who had done the fighting. Only Karn seemed relaxed as the ship rose and hovered above the Green Ones.

"Well," Andra said bitterly, "Nobla is gone. There's only Luma now. And soon the Green Ones will have that."

"Nobla was yours?" Karn asked.

"All of Mahlo was ours," Andra told him. "But that was only until the Green Ones got started. Now we have only one city left, and not many Mahloans to defend that."

Scorn flashed from her eyes at Harus and Ven. "And you saw how brave they are," she said to Karn.

"Where is this Luma?" Karn asked, disregarding her thrust at the two Mahloans.

"Not far. After we have a look at what the Green Ones have done to Nobla, we'll go there."

The great ball skimmed over the

meadow, lifted above the walls of Nobla and rose to the height of the tallest towers of the city. For a while it hovered alongside a great stone gargoyle that peered down into the street below. Bodies were strewn along the streets, Karn saw. They were all male.

"The women escaped," he observed. He heard Andra suck in a sharp breath and turned to her.

She was pointing to a nearby roof. From a doorway there a woman of her kind had emerged and was running across the roof toward the parapet. Behind her came three of the Green Ones.

Only shreds of the woman's clothes remained. Her face was clearly visible to Karn. It was the face of a woman crazed by fear and shock. She reached the parapet, paused, and saw that the Green Ones were almost on her. Without hesitation she jumped. Karn watched her fall until she hit the street.

"This would happen to you too?" he asked Andra.

"If the Green Ones caught me. And eventually they will."

The Green Ones slept. Their guards were at the gate as a matter of course. But they slept secure in the belief that there could be no attack. Karn grinned into the darkness as he dropped.

Peering ahead, he saw vague figures and moved toward them on soundless feet. Only three or four of them here. It would not take long. His hands reached out and closed on a throat.

It was ridiculous that the Mahloans should be afraid of these creatures. But they were afraid of

their own women, so it might have been expected. Yet they were more afraid of Karn than of either.

He had bunched his muscles and scowled at them. And they had quailed. They were afraid to follow him. But they were more afraid not to follow. Karn thought that when the sun rose he would find his men waiting outside the gates of Nobla.

Four of the Green Ones lay dead at his feet as he sought for the bolts that held the gate shut. Very slowly he drew those bolts. All it would take to open the gates would be the slightest push.

But it was taking him longer than he had expected. Already the sky was purpling. Running now, Karn sped down the broad avenue toward a tall, gargoyle-topped building.

He found ledges, plenty of handholds, but it was a long climb. The rising sun caught him still twenty feet from the roof. Below, the city stirred and came awake.

Green Ones were in the street. Karn prayed that they would not look up. His prayer proved futile. He moved faster as bird-like cries came up to him. He had been discovered.

Climbing desperately now, he got a hand over the parapet just as a green snout poked its way over. Karn struck out and the snout vanished. Then he was over.

More of the Green Ones came at him as he gained the roof. Snatching up a fallen spear, Karn drove them back. By sheer ferocity of his attack he forced them back through the doorway from which they had emerged. The door slammed between them.

They thought he was going to

follow. He could hear them chattering among themselves on the other side of the door. They were trying to decide what to do. Their discussion gave Karn exactly the time he needed.

His eyes roved the roof, trying to find something that would be heavy enough to hold the door against those on the other side. He had to protect his back. But the roof seemed blank.

But there was something Karn could use. The gargoyles. Great architectural excrescences, they had never served any purpose. They could serve a purpose now.

Each was the size of a small boulder, weighing close to six hundred pounds. Karn lifted one easily, carried it to the door, and set it down. One more trip and he was safe.

From the edge of the roof he could see beyond the wall. His hundred were there, puny indeed from this height. His yell brought them around.

They could see him, but they were still afraid. Indecision held them motionless for an instant. Then they began to move. And they moved forward.

The Green Ones had not seen them yet. Their own eyes were turned up at this shouting giant on the roof. Then the gates of the city swung open and Karn's men were in the broad street.

Swarms of the Green Ones poured from the buildings. They paused to form a line of attack, their spears poised in readiness. That was when Karn went into action.

He ripped a gargoyle loose from

the mortar that held it and dropped it over the parapet. Before it landed he had started another on its way down.

On the Green Ones they fell with devastating suddenness, each one crushing dozens. Another of the great missiles fell, and another. A half dozen of them there had been in all, and when the last one landed the street was a shambles.

Karn's men fell on the disorganized remnants of the Green Ones. Hairless the Mahloans were, and puny. But there was a trace of manhood still in them. Spears darted and clubs flailed, and the Green Ones fell.

Karn had known that only the taste of blood was needed. And he had been right. Now his men knew that they too could fight, and that the Green Ones were not irresistible.

By the time Karn reached the ground again the Green Ones were in full flight. As long as they had held the upper hand they had been brave enough. In the face of resistance they were cowardly.

Like Tur, Karn thought. Or like any other bully.

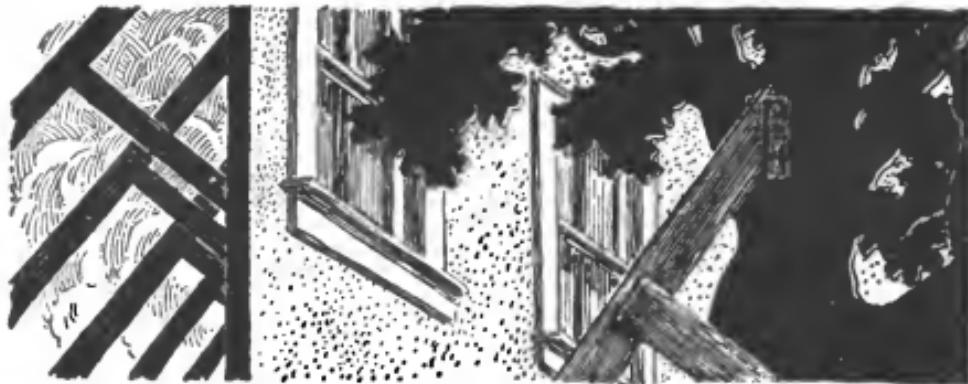
Then he looked up. A shadow crossed his path and he saw the great ball skim over the city. Tur was forgotten now. As he went toward the landing field with his men, Karn knew that he would never return to Earth. As long as Andra was on Mahlo, he wanted to be there too.

"You beat them!" she cried as she came from the ship.

"Yes. And we will drive them from every city on Mahlo and back to the forests from which they came."

"But that won't be necessary.

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YOU COULD BE WRONG

By ROBERT BLOCH

It started the day that Harry Jessup bought a TV set. Even then it might have worked out all right, only he started to worry about the commercials.

The end was inevitable. Too bad that the innocent victims had to be his own wife and a good friend. Or was "innocent" the right word?

WHEN Harry Jessup came back from Korea, he wasn't aware of the change. Not immediately.

Marge was still waiting for him, so they got married and bought a little ranchhouse out in Skyland Park. Harry got a job at Everlift, and although he noticed money didn't seem

to go very far these days, he managed to get along. He and Marge made friends with the couple next door—the Myers, very nice people; Ed Myers was a CPA—and pretty soon they bought a television set.

That's probably what set him off.

One night he and Marge



were watching the Sloucho Marks quiz show. Harry had always liked Sloucho in the old days, when he was making pictures, and he could still quote most of the lyrics to *Hooray For Captain Mauldin*.

Marge kept laughing at Sloucho's cracks during the program, and she was a little surprised to see that Harry was just sitting there, staring at the screen. He never smiled. When it was time for the last commercial, Harry got up and turned off the set.

"What's the matter?" Marge asked.

Harry muttered something that sounded like, "Fake!" but Marge wasn't really interested in his reply. She'd asked a purely rhetorical question and intended to follow it up with certain remarks which she now delivered.

"I thought it was a very funny show, myself," she said. "What's wrong with you, Harry? You always liked Sloucho Marks before."

"Yeah," Harry said. He just sat there, staring at the blank screen.

"You've got to admit he's the cleverest ad-libber in the world," Marge persisted. "Maybe he's a little corny, but I'd like to see you do any better, Harry Jessup."

Harry scowled at her.

"Perhaps I could," he murmured, "if I had four writers."

"Four writers?" Marge was genuinely shocked. "What are you talking about?"

"He's got four writers," Harry said. "I read about it in the paper."

Marge sniffed. "Why, I never heard of such a ridiculous idea! Everybody knows it wouldn't work. How can anybody write such a show in advance when they don't know who's going to be chosen as contestants?"

"They know," Harry told her. "It's all fixed in advance. Rehearsals and everything."

"Nonsense!"

"Some of the people who are going to be on the show even advertise ahead of time in the Hollywood trade papers," Harry said.

"Who told you that?"

"Read it."

"Well, I don't believe a word of it," Marge declared. "I think you're just jealous, or something. I bet you wouldn't mind trading places with Sloucho Marks any day."

"Maybe I could," Harry answered.

"What are you talking about?" Marge sat down heavily and began tapping her foot.

"I mean, maybe I could be

Sloucho Marks," Harry said. "How do you know you're seeing the real Sloucho on TV now?"

"Oh, don't be ridiculous! Just because he's given up wearing that false moustache—"

"Did you ever see him before without it? I mean, outside of his last movies where he appeared alone?"

"No—but—"

"Maybe there isn't a real Sloucho," Harry persisted. "Maybe there never was. Remember in one of his early movies where he stood in front of this mirror frame and thought there was glass in it? And Cheeko put on a moustache and pretended to be his reflection? Cheeko looked just like Sloucho. Anybody can, with a little makeup."

"What's come over you, Harry?"

"Nothing. It just occurred to me how easy it would be to pull off a stunt like that nowadays. Anybody with four writers and a physical resemblance could act the part. The whole thing's a fake from start to finish. A pretended ad-libber purporting to interview phony contestants in a comedy show which is supposed to be a quiz program. All a big fraud."

"I don't understand why you're getting so riled up over nothing," Marge snapped. "If you get right down to it, Sloucho certainly didn't write all his own parts in the old days."

"Of course not." Harry sighed. "But nobody ever tried to pretend he did. When you saw him on the stage or in the movies, you knew it was make-believe. Now they try to get you to think it's real. That's what bothers me."

"But it is real. You saw it!"

Harry Jessup shook his head. "No I didn't. And neither did you. All we saw was a wave-pattern, reproduced. You don't really see a picture on TV; your eyes merely interpret it that way. Same as moving pictures—they don't move. I was reading all about it in *Popular*—"

Marge sniffed again. "Did it ever occur to your precious intellect that maybe what you read is phony, too? Just because it's printed somewhere, that's no reason you have to believe it any more than if you saw it."

Harry blinked. "I never thought of that angle before."

Marge saw her advantage and pursued it. "Well, suppose you think about it before you sound off any more. How do you know it's true Sloucho

has four writers? That could be a lie, too." She smiled triumphantly.

"Yes." Harry didn't smile back. "Yes, it could be, couldn't it? But why—that's what I want to know. What's the meaning of it?" He paused and stared down at Marge's foot.

Marge noticed his stare and stopped tapping. "Sorry," she said. "Didn't mean to get on your nerves."

"Well, it does," Harry declared. "I wish you wouldn't wear those heels. You're five-feet-two. Why must you pretend to be five-feet-four?"

Marge went over and put her hand on Harry's forehead. When she spoke, her voice was soft. "What's gotten into you?" she asked. "Don't you feel well?"

Harry reached up and clasped her hand. He pulled it down to eye-level. "Nail polish," he muttered. "Pretending you have red nails. Don't understand it."

"You're sick. You've got a fever—" Marge rose. "I'll get the thermometer and we'll see."

He shook his head. "I don't need any thermometer."

Marge decided to humor him. "Just for fun," she said. "After all, it's a brand new one. I just bought it, and we

might as well get *some* use out of it."

"New one. That's just the trouble. It might be a phony, too. Built to register fever when there isn't any."

"Harry!"

"I'm going to bed." He stood up and shuffled over to the door. "You asked what's gotten into me," he said. "I don't know. Maybe it's honesty."

Marge knew better. Harry had a fever, all right. He went to work Friday, but when he came home his face was flushed and his eyes were red. He didn't say very much, either.

They sat down to eat, and Harry stared at his plate. "What's this?" he asked in a harsh voice.

"Mock chicken legs."

"Mock chicken?" Harry pushed his plate away. "Why can't we have real chicken for a change?"

"I don't know. I just thought—"

Harry was looking over the table now, muttering to himself. "White bread. You know how they make white bread these days? Take all the nourishment out and then fortify it artificially with vitamins. Oleo instead of butter. Process cheese. That's syn-

thetic, too. And instant coffee—”

“But you know how much regular coffee costs nowadays, dear.”

“Doesn’t matter. Suppose it was beer instead of coffee. Same thing. Brewed with chemicals instead of the old way. Eyen the water isn’t water any more—it’s something filled with chlorine and fluorine and heaven only knows what.”

Harry pushed back his chair.

“Where are you going?”

“Out for a walk.”

Marge drew in her breath. “You aren’t going down to the tavern—?”

He made a barking sound, then caught himself. “What’s the matter with me?” he said. “Can’t I even come up with a genuine laugh any more? It’s getting me fast, the thing’s contagious, isn’t it?”

“Harry, you promised you wouldn’t go to that tavern—”

“Don’t worry about me.” He smiled. “Tavern! It isn’t a tavern, it’s a saloon. No such thing as a real tavern, you know. Just a name they use to make it sound fancy. In a real tavern you used to be able to drink whiskey. Nowadays you get something called a blend—65 per cent or 72 per cent neutral spirits,

artificially aged in imitation-charred casks. Fake!”

Marge came over to him, but he pushed her away. “Why do you use perfume?” he asked. “You don’t smell that way, really.”

“Lie down,” she whispered. “I’ll call Doctor Lorentz.”

“Don’t want a doctor. Just going for a walk. Got to think.” Harry looked at the wall. “Quit my job today.”

“Quit your job?” She was suddenly tense. “Why?”

“Tired of it. Tired of making brassieres. Falsies. That’s what they call them and that’s what they are—false. I want to get into something real.”

He backed over to the door. “Don’t worry. We’ll work things out. I’ll figure a way, if there is a way.”

Then he was gone.

For a moment, Marge watched him through the window, then bit her lip and hurried to the telephone.

Harry came back in about an hour. Marge met him at the door.

“Feel better, dear?” she asked.

“Yeah.” He patted her shoulder. “I’m all right.”

“Good.” She smiled. “Ed Myers is in the living room.”

“What’s he doing here?” “Just dropped in to visit.

Thought he'd like to talk to you, I guess."

"You *guess!*!" Harry stepped back. "You told him to come over, didn't you?"

"Well——"

"Lies," he muttered. "All lies. Oh, what the hell, I'll see him."

He strode into the living room.

"Hello, Harry," said Ed Myers. Myers was a big, blonde, jolly fat man with round baby-blue eyes. He sat there in the easy chair, puffing on a cigarette.

"Hi," Harry said. "Want a drink?"

"No, thanks. Just dropped in for a minute."

Harry sat down and Myers grinned amiably. "How's tricks?" he asked.

"Tricks! It's all tricks."

"What's that?"

"You heard me. You ought to know. You and this 'just dropped in for a minute' routine. Marge called you over, didn't she?"

"Well——"

"What did she tell you?" Harry leaned forward, his expression angry.

"Nothing, really. That is, she said you'd been sort of under the weather lately. Figured there might be something on your mind you'd like to talk about. And seeing

as how I'm a friend of yours——"

"Are you?"

"You know that, pal."

"Do I? I'm beginning to wonder if I know anything. Maybe that's it—I didn't know, but I'm starting to find out."

"I don't get it, Harry."

"Just took a walk. Walked around the block a couple of times, then down to the corner. What did I see?"

"You got me, pal. What did you see?"

"Fakes. Phonies. Frauds."

"This doesn't sound like you, Harry."

"How do you know what I sound like? Really, I mean?"

Harry Jessup bit his lip. "Listen, and I'll try to explain. I walk down the street and I look back at this house. This house—what is it? They call it a 'ranchhouse.' Why? It's not on a ranch. It's not the kind of a house anybody ever built on a real ranch. Just a five-room crackerbox with a fake gable in front and a fake chimney to indicate a non-existent fireplace. This neighborhood is full of them. A thousand neighborhoods are full of them. Must be five, maybe ten million such places built in the last few years."

"So why get excited over a thing like that?"

"I'm not excited. Just curious. About a lot of things. Skyland Park, for instance. That's the name of this suburb, isn't it? But it's not a park, and there's no view of the sky around here. Everything's blotted out by TV aerials. People sitting in the dark, watching something that's not real but pretending to themselves that it is."

Ed Myers chuckled. "Marge told me about Sloucho Marks," he said. "Mean to say you let a little thing like that get on your nerves?"

"It isn't a little thing, Ed. At least, I don't think so. Everything's like that nowadays. I didn't understand at first when I came back, but I get the picture now. I got it tonight. The TV all over, and men standing outside washing their cars. Hundreds of average men, but none of them own an average car."

"How's that again?"

"Ever stop to think about that, Ed? No average cars any more. Everybody's got a Commander, or a Land Cruiser, or a Coup de Ville or a Roadmaster or a Champion. Even the poorest slob owns a Super Deluxe Model. Aren't there any plain, old-fashioned automobiles any more? I haven't seen any. Just mil-

lions of Hornets and Ambassadors and Strato-jets, driven by people who have no place to go. No *real* place, that is. They drive to the movies and see 3D which isn't really three-dimensional, or they go over to a grocery store built like an Italian Doge's palace which calls itself a Supermarket and offers Below Cost Bargains yet still makes a profit, and—"

"Dig this!" Ed Myers chuckled again. "You talk like a Commie."

"How do you know how a Commie talks?" Harry retorted. "You ever hear one? Did you ever see one in the flesh?"

"Why, no, but I read the papers, everybody knows about Communists."

"You mean everybody is told about them. You read what's printed, that's all. How do you know any of it ever happened?"

"Hey, wait a minute, Harry!"

"You read about the President's latest speech, but he didn't write it—some team of ghostwriters ground it out. You read about the war, and what you read is censored. You read about some movie star, and it turns out to be a planted publicity story, concerning an interview that never occurred. How do you

know what actually happens? Or if anything is actually happening?"

"Say, you are serious, aren't you?"

"I don't know. I walked and walked tonight, trying to figure things out. Nothing makes sense. Ed, I saw the kids in the street. Little kids running around playing cops and robbers, cowboy and Indian, playing war. It scared me."

"Why should it scare you, pal? Didn't you do those things when you were a kid?"

"Sure. Of course I did. But I didn't play the same way. I knew it was a game, just making-believe. I'm not so sure about the kids today. I swear, from the way they act, they think it's real."

"Harry, you're making a mountain out of a molehill."

"That's the fashion, isn't it? If I really knew how, I could become quite wealthy in these times. Anybody who can take a molehill and persuade people into thinking it's a mountain is right in style. Look at that!"

Ed Myers was lighting another cigarette, but Harry snatched it out of his mouth.

"Here you are," he said. "Perfect example. The world's finest tobacco, isn't it? Mildest, choicest, most expen-

sive blend. That's how it's advertised. Do you believe it? Do you realize there are a hundred brands that cost more, taste better?"

"But everybody knows about advertising—"

"I'm not talking about advertising. It used to be bad enough, when advertising was the only big offender. But things like this are happening all over. We're losing the truth, Ed. The truth about everything. Politics, government, world affairs, business, education—we get it all through a filter, selected and distorted. Where has reality disappeared to?"

"You're getting yourself all worked up over nothing," Ed Myers said. "What you need is a vacation, little relaxation."

"Relaxation? How? I listened to the radio last Sunday. Jack Benny. He did a show which was supposed to take place ten minutes before he went on the air. In the middle of the program he pretended he was going on the air and got himself introduced all over again. Then in a few minutes, during the pretended show, he was supposed to go over to visit the home of a cast-member. By this time I couldn't even follow what he was pretending to pretend.

"Movies are worse. Did you ever see that oldie, *Jolson Sings Again?* Larry Parks plays Jolson, of course, but Jolson did the singing. That's par for the course these days. But then, in the middle of the picture, Parks as Jolson is supposed to meet Parks as Parks. And he plays both parts. Parks-Jolson talks to Parks-Parks about making a picture of Jolson's life, and then the picture of Jolson's life goes on to show how a picture of Jolson's life was made. Only what is shown isn't what really happened to begin with, so——"

"Calm down, boy!" Myers grinned. "It's all in fun."

"I'm calm. But I'm not so sure about the fun part. Not any more. This is getting serious. I happen to like real things. And everything is ersatz."

"You're just picking out a few examples and magnifying them all out of proportion."

"Proportion? How do we know what proportion is? You've got to have something to measure against. Pontius Pilate asked 'What is Truth?' I'm still worried about the answer."

"Well, if you want to drag religion into it——"

"I'm not dragging religion into it. Look at yourself, for

example." Harry Jessup was on his feet now, almost shouting. "You're wearing a sports jacket. You a sportsman by any chance? No. Examine those pearl buttons. Are they made of pearl? Not on your life. That gold watchband—it's not gold, is it? Regimental stripe tie. You ever belong to the Coldstream Guards? Your shoes, with the leather heels that aren't even leather. Fake, every bit of it a fake! And you're so used to a world of fakery you aren't even conscious of it any more. CPA, that's your job. Filling out fake income tax returns for fake business men who contribute sums for fictitious government expenditures——"

"Harry, you're shouting!" Marge came into the room. "What's wrong?"

"Everything." He went over to her now and his finger stabbed again and again. He talked for Ed Myers' benefit. "Look at her. Blonde curly hair. Know why? Bleach and a permanent wave. Two false teeth in front. Foundation garment to disguise her shape. Been married to her for almost a year, and I swear I've never seen her real face —just a lot of makeup. Make-up and fake mannerisms, that's all she is!"

Marge started to cry. "You see," she sobbed. "That's what I meant. He's been like this ever since last night."

Ed Myers wasn't smiling any more. He nodded gravely. "Maybe we ought to call some specialist and—"

"Wait a minute," Harry said. "Wait a minute! You think I'm cracking up, don't you? You think I'm real gone in the head."

Myers shrugged. He didn't say anything.

"All right." Harry lowered his voice with an effort. "All right. Maybe I'd better tell you the rest."

"The rest?" Marge stopped sniffling. Ed Myers hunched forward, picking at his ear.

"Yeah. I never said anything about it before, because I thought it was just a lot of malarkey when I heard it. Now I'm not so sure."

"Heard what?" Myers asked.

"About the bombs." Harry took a deep breath. "Last year, when I was in Korea, this rumor came along. Nobody ever found out how it started. Anyway, we all heard it. According to the way it went, the Russians came over and bombed the United States. Bombed hell out of it. That was one story. At the

same time, we heard another. This one was different. According to the second rumor, it wasn't the Russians at all. Some of our own scientists came up with a new kind of bomb. "They tested it" but there was a chain-reaction, a big one. Blew up the whole damn' country!"

"A specialist—" Myers began.

"Wait. Let me finish. Then you can call your specialist, if you want to. Somebody ought to be able to give me an answer."

Marge came over to Harry and put her hand on his arm. "Listen to me, Harry," she said. "Are you trying to tell me you think the country was destroyed while you were in Service?"

"I don't know," he muttered. "I don't know what I'm trying to tell you, or myself, either."

"Be reasonable, Harry. Think for a moment. You're *here*, aren't you? and so are we. We're *in* this country. So how could it be destroyed? Do you see any ruins, any signs of bombing?"

"No. But I wouldn't. Not if all the real things were gone and the fakes remained. You can't destroy what actually doesn't exist."

Ed Myers stood up. He

glanced significantly at Marge. "Let me use your phone," he said.

Marge waved her hand. "Wait. Not yet. Give him a chance to explain."

"Thanks." Harry smiled up at her gratefully. "You know, this business of *seeing* things proves nothing. They say when you're born, you see things upside down. I don't understand it, but the image is supposed to be received on the retina that way, and then translated by the brain so that you think it's right-side up. The whole business of seeing is cockeyed, anyhow. This thing that looks like a table, as I remember it, is just trillions and trillions of little particles jumping up and down in waves. All our senses are playing tricks on us; smell, hearing, everything. Lots of people get hallucinations—"

"Don't they, though?" Myers glanced again at Marge, and picked at his right ear once more.

"Please," Marge whispered.

Harry went on. "So maybe none of us ever comes close to Reality, after all. We just sort of *agree* amongst ourselves that certain things are real and certain things are not real. We base those agree-

ments on the evidence of our senses; if we all get just about the same reactions, we decide to believe or disbelieve accordingly. You follow me?"

"I think so," Marge said. "But doesn't that prove you're living in a real world?"

"Not any more. Not since this phony stuff took over, the way it has in the last ten years or so. I said our senses can play tricks. Maybe they've gotten so used to the fakes they can't detect the difference any more. Maybe there's a sort of a balancing-point somewhere. As long as 50 per cent of our environment is real, we're safe. We can still recognize it, use it as a gauge to judge our surroundings. But when there isn't 50 per cent left—when more than half of the things we see, or hear, or say, or do, or own or experience are false—then how can we tell? Maybe we reached that point a long time ago and didn't know it. Maybe we're all hypnotized into believing in the existence of a lot of things. If that was so, then the real world could actually disappear and we'd never even suspect it. Because all the illusions we've come to think of as reality would still remain."

"Sort of a mirage, eh?" Ed Myers nodded. "You sure

worked yourself up a theory, boy. But there's kind of a hole in it, isn't there?"

"Hole?"

"Well, just for the sake of argument, supposing something like that had happened. Let's even use that rumor you and the troops heard over in Korea, about how the whole country was knocked out by chain-reaction. Then how could you come back here again to live? There'd be nothing left, isn't that right? No people, no buildings, no radio or TV or books or movies or any of the stuff you're so badly worried about."

"But if we believed it was here—" Harry started, then stopped. "Come to think of it, I guess you're right."

"Of course I'm right." Myers smiled again. "You just think about it a while, boy. Everything'll straighten out. Take a rest for a few days, you'll get over it."

Marge smiled, too. "You gave us an awful scare, Harry."

"Scare?" Harry Jessup blinked. "Scare? Could that be it?"

"Could what be what?"

"Scare. The flying saucers scare. Remember? We heard all about it. Sure—that could be the answer!"

"Oh, Harry, for heaven's sake—"

"Same deal. Nobody knew whether *they* were real or fake either. But suppose they were real. And they dropped the bombs. A new kind. Wiped out the country and took over. Nobody'd ever know. They'd send out fake reports, create an illusion that nothing had changed. People coming in from abroad would find everything the same. So accustomed to fakery in normal life they wouldn't notice the difference. Just as I didn't notice."

Ed Myers groaned. Marge sighed.

"That's the answer!" Harry cried. "It has to be the answer! Nobody left at all, and the whole thing an illusion built up to protect whoever or whatever owns this country now—built up to fool the few real people left, the ones in Service who came back! They'll just have to keep things going until we're dead and buried and then the masquerade is over."

"No wonder they keep pouring out more and more synthetics all the time! Do it to deaden our faculties, get us so used to the artificial we'll forget there ever was anything real. Who remembers when Hopalong Cassidy was

lame, when Wild Bill Hickok was an outlaw instead of a hero? Today kids think there really was a man named Sherlock Holmes—if there are any kids, that is."

"Are any kids?" Marge shuddered. "Do you know what you're saying now? Are you inferring that—?"

Harry paused. "Yeah," he said, slowly. "Yeah. Come to think of it, I am."

He walked over to Ed Myers, who was still picking his ear. Suddenly he reached out and grabbed at Myers, trying to reach the side of his head.

Myers ducked, moved back in alarm.

"That gray spot," Harry whispered. "I think I know what it is, now."

"Keep away from me!" Ed Myers yelled.

But Harry didn't keep away. He lunged forward, grabbing up the paper-knife from the desk and bringing it down with a single, startling motion.

There was a ripping sound. Harry plunged the paper-knife into Myers' head.

"Look!" he shouted. "I was right—nothing but sawdust! Sawdust and a bunch of cog-wheels."

Myers fell to the floor and lay still.

Marge began to scream.

"Look!" Harry yelled. "Sawdust, all over the rug! Can't you see—?"

He stopped. Marge kept staring at the floor, her scream subsiding to a whimper. "Harry, you've killed him."

"How could I kill something that isn't real? Something stuffed with sawdust?"

"Take another look," Marge said. "That isn't sawdust. It's blood."

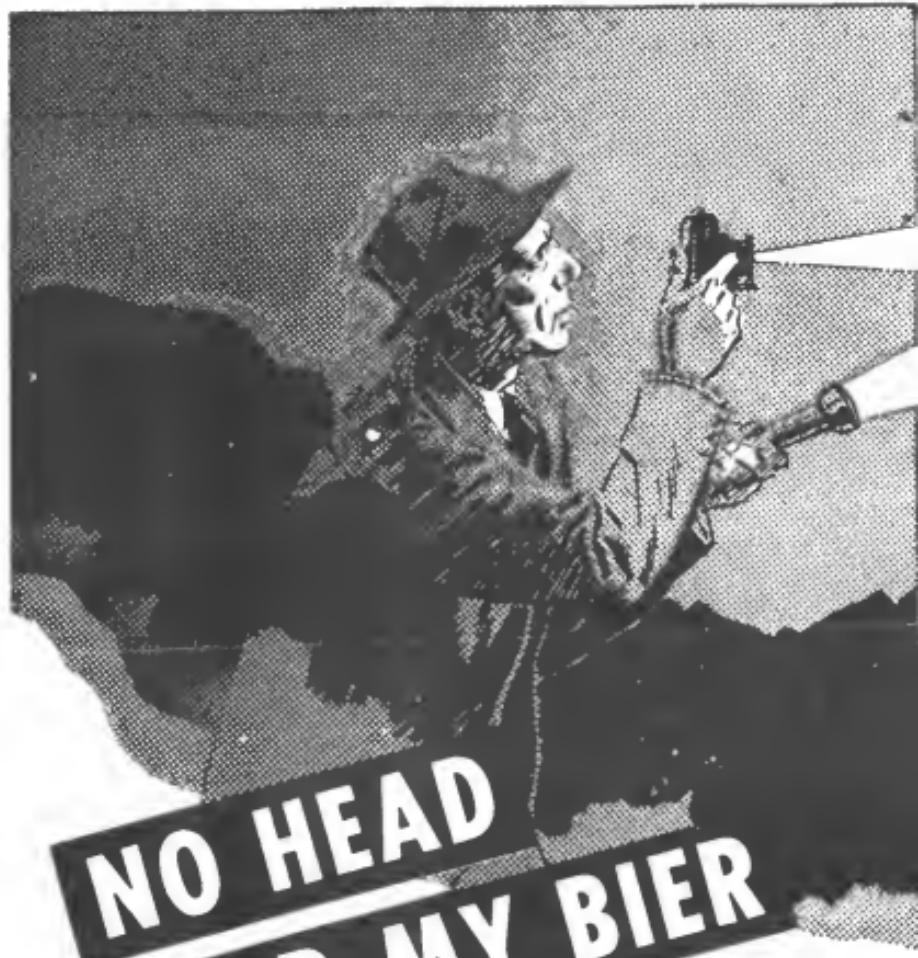
Harry took another look. The knife clattered to the floor. He stared down at the slowly widening red pool. . . .

He was still staring when Marge went to the phone. He was still staring when she came back. He was still staring when the squad-car arrived.

After that there were questions, many questions, and a lot of men crowded around, and somebody came in with a camera and flashbulbs and took pictures, and then they took Ed Myers' body away, and finally they took Harry away too.

At the end, there was nobody left but Marge. She was all alone and there was nothing else to do, so she got out the dustpan and the broom and swept up the little pile of sawdust from the floor.

THE END



**NO HEAD
FOR MY BIER**

LESTER DEL REY

Valentine August's face meant a fortune to a lot of people until it was stolen away by the sometimes too clever Dr. Coma!



It's true that the television industry has been making offers of a billion or so to lease rights to *Claudius the Cat*, but you'll still be a fool to rush out for that big-screen set. The movie boys still remember the days before *Valentine August* lost his face, when they were worrying about TV putting them out of business. And now that the tax on reserved-in-advance ad-

missions to *Claudius the Cat* films has paid off the national debt well, what's a billion or two?

It just goes to show that the beer in Brooklyn is worth a little loss of face. Any sailor will tell you lots of things get lost after beer in Brooklyn. But this time it was different; it happened to *Valentine August*, whose face was Colossal's fortune; and Val-

entine lost his face—not to mention his head—before the beer.

Naturally, Valentine August wasn't thinking of that—since he didn't know what was coming, mercifully—as the stratospheric drew in toward New York. He was thinking of the thirty-eight New York Valentine August Fan Clubs; mostly he was thinking of No. 32, where on his last visit the vice-president had kissed him—with loose bridgework that slipped—and bit him. Valentine sighed. He was not fond of New York, and definitely doubtful of the dental skill of the technicians patronized by the members. He hated all premieres, even the gala one scheduled for his latest, *Compose Yourself, Arthur*. And then there was that nut, Professor Coma, who kept sending him threatening letters from some place in Brooklyn.

If Lorelei Lee hadn't gone east for the premiere, he'd have stayed home and gone on a binge. But as the writer of the opus, she was already in New York. And in addition to being the best script-writer for Colossal, she was so lovely that after one look at her, Valentine found it difficult to reconcile himself to kissing Lana Turner, Hedy Lamarr and the other cookies he ran across in his movie-making.

He sighed, and reached for his handkerchief, just as something dropped out of nowhere into his hand. There was writing on it, short and not too sweet:

"Valentine August, you are a ham and the bane of all lovers of cinematic art. If I were not a tenderhearted man, I should eliminate you. (Signed) Prof. Graham Coma."

Valentine made short sounds, loud enough to wake up his producer in the next seat. Joe Epic looked up, snorted, and made the nasty sort of noise only a producer can make.

"You still mooning over Lorelei Lee?"

Valentine forgot the note at her name. All his troubles came trooping back. While he'd stared at her golden hair, tiny tip-tilted nose, and wide, upslanting eyes, barely resisting the temptation to howl like a wolf, she'd made comments. She'd claimed she'd vote the Academy Award to any alley cat in preference to him. She'd indicated he was half of America's favorite breakfast, the other half being eggs; and that he'd caused the rebirth of vaudeville. She mentioned that his strangely dry, learned voice was a fine thing to hear, but as romantic as cold ravioli on soggy toast. She'd given him the name of a school that taught plumbing.

"No, Joe," Valentine answered. I'm not mooning over her. Just wondering when we arrive. . . . Did I tell you she went out and picked up an alley cat—the meanest, biggest tomcat she could get? And named it July, because that always comes before August?"

Joe Epic grunted. "Tell me about it sometime. Trouble with you, Valentine, is you let her walk on you. What you should do, see, is grab her, hold her, and kiss her young head off. And take that paper outa your hair."

Joe went back to sleep as Valentine felt his head and pulled out the note, absent-mindedly. Valentine the gentleman . . . or August, the caveman? Lorelei had never seen the

savage, primitive August—but she was going to.

His eye found the writing on the note: "P.S. I am not a tender-hearted man. (Signed) Coma."

Now how did that get there?

The paper in his hand gave a wiggle and vanished, to be replaced by another message, still shorter.

"Teleportation, you dope. Coma."

Valentine August, caveman, hesitated in front of Lorelei's door. Maybe the hotel clerk had pocketed his money and announced him, anyway; maybe she wouldn't answer; maybe she'd gone out. He brought up a savage, primitive fist, hesitated, and tapped his fingernails against the wood. Then the door opened.

Lorelei stood there, wearing something blue and clinging, and staring at the floor, before she brought her eyes up with the light fading out of them. Valentine was suddenly breathless and strangely hot and cold, like someone who had just swallowed an acetylene torch and an ice cube.

He gulped. "Lorelei," he mewled, "I—ah—mmm . . ." The acetylene torch was winning.

Lorelei's shoulders drooped. "Oh, it's you. I thought it was July—he's been missing two days. I was hoping. . . . But I should have known you'd be here for the premiere. Well—come in, I suppose."

She made a point of selecting a chair that barely held her, and he slumped on the couch nearby. There was a short silence.

Valentine broke it finally. "I didn't come for the premiere, Lorelei."

"Didn't you?"

"You know I didn't," said Valentine. "I hate premieres." He looked

at her. "I came to New York because you were here."

"Oh?" said Lorelei.

"You don't have to get nasty about it," Valentine said, detecting a curious note in her voice. There was a picture of a huge tiger-striped tomcat on the wall beside her, and that, he felt, was bad enough. There was no reason to add insult to injury.

"I wasn't getting nasty. I just said 'Oh?'"

"That's just it—just 'Oh?'" Valentine said. "If Juliet had treated Romeo that way, he'd have set fire to the balcony. Why, your attitude toward me is so well known that even though we've talked together on the set three times, not a single columnist has announced we're secretly married."

"I—know," Lorelei said. "I guess I've been a little rude."

"Rude isn't the word," said Valentine, pushing his point and wondering if the caveman line was working already. "You're calling the atom-bomb a firecracker. You should be ashamed of yourself."

Lorelei stared at the floor. "I know. Since somebody stole July, I've been thinking of him—and you. It's not as though I *really* disliked you. . . ."

"What!" Valentine's heart developed a sudden return to enthusiasm for its work. "What did you say?" he asked, stifling a few hymns.

Lorelei's voice was small and meek. "I don't really dislike you."

Sharp, succinct Anglo-Saxon tetrilaterals were on the tip of Valentine's tongue, struggling to get ahead of the hymns, but he stifled these, too. He leaped to his feet, lifted Lorelei from her chair savagely and held

her before him, digging primitive fingers into her slim shoulders.

"You monstrous young horror! The nerve of you—treating me like a leper for weeks, and then telling me cool as a snub-nosed cucumber that you don't really dislike me." He lifted her into the air, placed her on the couch, and settled beside her. "All right, start talking. I want to know all, and unless you're angling for the spanking you deserve, it had better be good."

Lorelei looked up at him, her sweet, beautiful face troubled. "It's—I guess it's—your face," she said.

"My face!" Valentine groaned. "Everything else, and now you come to that. For Pete's sake, you told me last time my face was all that kept me in pictures—without it, I'd have less fan appeal than Karloff's socks."

"That's just it," Lorelei explained. "It's a good face—too good. The kind of face sculptors try to put on statues of Greek gods. . . . Stop smirking!"

"That," said Valentine, "wasn't a smirk. It was a tender smile. And what's wrong with a face like that?"

"It keeps you in pictures!" She leaned forward earnestly, so close her lips were almost on his, and only a mighty effort and his curiosity kept him from giving in to impulse. But she was speaking again. "Don't you see? I gave up writing fiction and turned to films because I've always felt that motion pictures had an unlimited future. I wanted to write good stories, help fine actors further the motion picture art, bring it to maturity. And then—then they assign me to writing scripts for *you*!"

Valentine couldn't see anything wrong with that, but he was still

dazzled by the nearness of her, so he nodded and made no comment.

She went on. "What advances the art? Great acting and the appreciation of great acting. And just when the moviegoers begin thinking about performances instead of looks, you come along—with no ability, nothing but a—face! And people forget all about acting and begin to trample each other after your pictures."

"You know," said Valentine suspiciously, "you sound exactly like Professor Coma. He says I've set motion pictures back ten years."

"He's conservative. Why, you've made it unfashionable to be a good actor. Why Rodney Royce and Martin Martin—both good actors, too, or they were—spend all their time in beauty parlors, and they're turning into hams. And Monroe Muck had to retire when the surgeon told him it would take a magician instead of a plastic surgeon. Can't you see why I feel the way I do?"

Valentine got to his feet. "No," he said. "I'll be damned if I can."

Joe Epic had been right. He shouldn't have listened. He should have acted. "Motion pictures are fine, Lorelei. But emotion fixtures are more important—and mine are plenty fixed. I'm tired of this—darned tired."

He grinned down at her, and then with a sudden movement, August the caveman swept her to her feet and drew her close to him.

"Wait," she said a little breathlessly. "Don't—please don't. What I've said may not mean anything to you—but it means a lot to me. . . ."

Valentine was too far gone for arbitration. "Nuts!" he said, quietly.

He kissed her, hard, long, fiercely. It was the grandfather of all kisses—a kiss he had saved up for a long time. He was floating on cloud seven...

Then her hands were on his chest, pushing him away. Her eyes were filled with cold fury. "Get out!"

He blinked. "But, listen, I—"

"Get out!"

He stood there uncertainly for a moment, not knowing what to say or do—dull pain within him at the old familiar expression on her face, and a good portion of self-disgust. Then he went out to find a brick wall, so that he could beat his head against it.

Valentine August never did know what happened during the next four hours, though he had a vague idea of dropping dimes in turn-stiles, changing trains at the end of the line, crossing platforms, and other mechanical operations. He didn't know why he'd gone into the subway in the first place; he hated the clatter and stuffiness. All he could remember clearly was the fury on Lorelei Lee's face, and that was what he wanted to forget.

Finally, though, something made him look down at his hands, to see another note. It vanished as he looked at it, but he'd had time to make out the words:

"So you're a ham in private life, too. That was an abominable performance, wasn't it? Come."

He threw a glance around, but the nearest seat was occupied by a sailor sleeping off a jag, and the only other person in the car was an old woman reading a paper and disagreeing violently at the top of her

voice with what she read. Valentine felt the train slowing, took another breath of the foul air, and made for the door.

He came out on loneliness and desolation, and his reverie took him deeper into the unknown, where the sidewalks turned to dirt roads, and the street lights grew fewer and fewer. This was the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, where visitors carry canteens and K rations. They used to send out search parties to rescue travelers there, but they've given that up—too many search parties were lost and never heard of again. But that didn't bother Valentine and his gloom.

It was only after he'd gone fifteen minutes without seeing a street light that he awoke to the fact he had no idea of how to get back. He lit a match, but there were no street signs, and it went out quickly in the smog. Another did no better.

"Damn," said Valentine to himself. "Wish there was a light."

Something huge and dazzling, like a dragon's eyes, swished into his face, and he leaped three feet into the air.

"Well!" a male voice said quietly. "Mr. Valentine August!"

"Very nearly the late Valentine August," said Valentine, settling to earth. "Do you always scare people out of ten years' growth?"

"You did ask for a light," the voice pointed out. "I was merely acceding to your request."

Valentine stared over the rays of the flashlight, but he could see nothing. "But I said that to myself. . . .

"I read your mind, of course," the man said. He laughed, a thin, bray-

ing snicker that ran up and down Valentine's back like a platoon of icicles. The flashlight flicked upwards to reveal a face that was almost all nose. "Naturally. I'm Coma—Alexander Graham Coma. Twenty seven degrees, but you wouldn't know what they meant."

"Coma! Then you're the man. . . .

"Precisely," said Coma. "I'm the man who brought you here."

"Brought me?" Valentine asked. "I wandered here purely by accident."

"Tch, tch, tch," Coma's nose wagged emphatically from side to side. "Simple long distance hypnotism. I do not permit chance events to enter my schemes!"

Valentine looked into the rays of the light, regretting that Coma was not dressed in a jacket featuring sleeves tied in back. This was rapidly turning into a hard day. He sighed. "As you say, Professor. And now—what next?"

"I shall take your picture," Coma told him thoughtfully. He studied Valentine carefully, and shook his head. "I must, you know. I made up my mind last week. . . . As I mentioned in my first letters, I've always been sure of the brilliant future of movies, certain that even the behavior of certain performers could never vitiate the talents of the great screen actors."

"Very true," Valentine agreed. "But why take my pic"

"Last week I saw a double feature. *The Bad Sky* with Paul Muni and something with you—*Relax, Max*, I think. I suffered through your film, then gloried through the brilliant work of Muni, with tears of pure pleasure coursing down these sunken cheeks."

"They're not sunken," Valentine said. "It's just your nose. . . ."

"Don't interrupt," Coma said crossly. "After the show, I listened to the conversation in the lobby. Did they rave over my hero? No! All they discussed was your face! The only time Muni was mentioned was when one fool said that *Looney*—the ignominy of it!—resembled a barber he'd known as a boy in Irkutsk! It was too much. Your face—or Muni's genius? I went home, set to work—and invented this."

He turned the rays of his flashlight on something that looked like a folding camera. Valentine leaned forward and realized that it was the kind of camera a surrealist might paint when very drunk, or Salvatore Dali when cold sober.

Suddenly Coma raised it, pointed it at Valentine, and whirled a knob on it. There was a flash of—*something*—and Valentine was yanked forward violently. His head was on fire and he couldn't see. He felt as though a mule with phosphorescent hooves had kicked him in the face.

The calm voice of Coma drifted through the mist. "I've just taken your face, August. Where an ordinary camera takes a negative image of film, my camera takes the positive subject itself. I've taken it by electromagnetically negative light, transducing the positively electromagnetic mass instantaneously onto the colloidal microplanar cube which I've compressed along one dimension into a film. Naturally, the matter has been replaced with electromagnetically negative mass, which behaves exactly opposite within the spectrum from positive mass—transmits light perfectly, instead of re-

flecting it. You understand, of course?"

He waited, and received no answer. Valentine was making gulping motions. Coma went on. "It needn't be permanent, but you've lost your face—and head—to all intents and purposes. You can still eat, chew, drink, and so on. But until this film is developed, you have no face. Then, of course, the positive mass dissolves and will automatically seek out and replace the negative mass, bringing you back to normal. . . You have one month, August. Succeed in that time without your face, and I'll return it to you. Fail, and I destroy the film. One month!"

Abruptly the flashlight clicked off, and Coma was gone.

Valentine began to walk forward, like a baby taking his first steps. The mist was beginning to clear before him, leaving the night's crisp blackness, but pain like hot lava still flowed through his head. Then, after a time, that vanished.

The long-nosed escapee from a Karloff film had done something to him, no doubt about that. His talk had been padded-cell matter, but something had happened. Maybe the camera had sprayed acid. . .

Valentine began running. Somewhere, street lights appeared, and a little butcher store. Valentine lit a match with shaking fingers and looked at his reflection in the store-window.

His beautifully cut blue suit was there, with the dark blue coat over it. His light-blue shirt was there, and his dark blue tie. His shoes were there, and his socks. Everything was there, with one exception.

He had no head.

As anyone who has tried it can tell you, a man who suddenly finds himself minus his head is in a spot. He cannot proceed to his home or hotel to think about it, because that involves passing people; and people, generally, react unfavorably to a headless man. He cannot stay where he is, because people will pass sooner or later, no matter where he is.

Valentine staggered along, not quite sure where he was headed—or unheaded. He staggered on until the lights of an all-night drugstore loomed up before him. Cautiously, he peered inside. The place was empty, except for one clerk, who sat at the back of the store happily reading a book by Philip St. John. There was a string of telephone booths just inside the doorway.

Valentine jerked open the door and leaped into a booth. The clerk looked up, saw the booth door close, and went back to his book. It was one of those books.

Valentine dialed Lorelei's hotel and swore at the clerk. Then there was a pause, and Lorelei's voice said, "Hello?"

"Don't hang up," Valentine said quickly. "This is Valentine. Remember you objected to my face—well, could you—ah—care for me, if. . . Lorelei, I don't have a face. And I'm in a jam. Does my voice sound hollow?"

There was a short silence. "No," Lorelei said finally, and it sounded like an answer to both questions. "Why should your voice sound hollow—except that it comes from your head?"

"I just thought it might," Valentine said morosely. "You see, uh—I

mean—Lorelei, I'm not talking through a mouth."

There was another pause. "You're drunk," Lorelei said.

Valentine gripped the phone tighter. "I'm not drunk, I swear I'm not. I was just walking in Brooklyn and some long-nosed guy took a picture, and my face disappeared, and. . ."

"Valentine!"

"Listen, you've got to believe me. I've got to see you, talk to you. How'm I going to get along without a head?"

"Try using your feet," Lorelei said, her voice fading into something about "Drunk as Bacchus." There was a sharp click at her end of the line.

"Wait!" Valentine cried. "Wait! You've got to. . ." His voice trailed off, and he hung up. What was he going to do now?

He saw a shadow on the booth door and turned to see the clerk approaching, an unlighted cigarette in his hand—obviously about to ask for a match. Valentine tried to shrink into the shadows, but it was no good. The clerk peered through the glass and saw him.

"Goooooo!" The clerk stood there paralyzed, and his knees began to buckle. Then they straightened. "Gooo-oo-oooo!" The clerk whirled and streaked through the door. He did not bother to open it.

Valentine shrugged, started out, and then turned to the back of the store. He found bandages on the shelves, opened them, and began to mummify the section of air which would normally house his face. The bandages wrapped around the air in the exact form his head would have had. He cut two circular chunks away for his eyes, appropriated some

dark glasses, shoved the earpieces between the bandages, into position, and surveyed the results in a mirror.

It wasn't bad. He looked like a man who had worn an orange tie at a St. Patrick's day clambake, but he might have been human.

There was no point in lingering. The clerk was probably out looking for moral support to return, and someone might happen along at any moment. Valentine walked to the frame of the front door and jerked it open. There was a startled, muffled "Goo!" and he heard footsteps running. Valentine ran in the other direction. After a while he reached a subway and approached the agent for information on getting back. The agent looked at his bandaged head with a bored eye and told him.

Only a local was running at that hour, and it seemed to stop at every station, backtrack, and stop at several a second time, but it finally got him home. He hesitated, then. His original idea had been to sleep over it, but there was no point in wasting time. He headed for Joe Epic's room.

Epic held his contract and made money from his pictures. It was up to him to protect his investment.

Epic opened the door, did a double-take, and there were dollar signs being erased in his eyes. "Help!"

"Control yourself, Joe," Valentine said. "Let's go inside and I'll tell you all about it."

They sat down opposite each other, Epic still staring at Valentine's bandages and groaning. "Well, what happened? What did you do to yourself?"

"I didn't do anything," Valentine said. "Joe, can you take it?"

Epic groaned again. "After seeing

you like that, I can stand anything."

Valentine began to unravel the bandages. He kept the glasses in front of the eye-holes until the last moment, then pulled the disguise away in one sweep. Epic stared at him, his eyes bulging in terror. Then he leaped gracefully over a nearby couch and crouched, shivering, behind it.

"For heaven's sake! Joe!" Valentine said disgustedly. He walked behind the couch.

Epic began to shuffle away on his hands and knees, not looking out. "Go away, dead man," he said. "I never harmed anyone. Maybe a few widows and orphans and rival producers once in a while, but nothing serious. Please go away—please."

Valentine grunted disgustedly. "I'm as alive as you are—more, the way you look now. Some man took a picture of me with a new camera, and it made my face invisible."

Trick camera effects was Epic's language. He got slowly to his feet, ran a hand shakily across his forehead, and said, "Let's hear."

Valentine told the story, including Coma's month in which to test him. When he finished, Epic was grinning again.

"Nothing to it," Epic said. "We'll announce you've been in an automobile accident and had a head injury, but you'll go on working in bandages. It'll be good publicity for a while—you'll be a success, and the inventor will give your face back. How's that?"

"That," said Valentine, "stinks. Coma's crazy, not dumb. He'll see through it. And we can't set up some executive job with a friend's firm, either; he'd find it was a fraud. Somehow, I've got to be a success

legitimately—and without a head!"

They sat in silence. Valentine went through three cigarettes—they still tasted the same—and Epic went through his fingernails and started on his knuckles.

Finally Valentine said cheerfully, "Well, Joe, we'll have to use your plan, I guess, even if my face is gone for good. My contract runs three years, and I'll just have to earn my keep."

Epic's voice was suddenly as cheerful. "Valentine," he said, "Can you take it? Because I'm tossing you over."

"Are you crazy?"

"Nope, just sane. Remember *Go Slow, Joe?* Big scene, thousands of extras at \$7.50 a day, cameras taking you riding your horse, money right and left—and you smiled into the cameras and said, 'Wish they'd give me a softer horse.' And what did I do—had the scene made over, and called it high spirits.

"*Or Take a Break, Jake?* Olga Stalingrad, all the way from Russia, highest salary, expensive build-up. So she was temperamental, and we warned you. Comes the big love scene, you bend down to kiss her—then you drop her and say, 'Is that nose real, or are you doubling for a parrot?' She goes to M. G. M., and we lose a big investment. But I smile like a father and figure you got some sense of humor.

"*Or Keep Cool-a, Caligula.* Big expensive chariot race scene, you supposed to be clenching your teeth and muttering. So thirty lip readers write in, claiming you spoil the illusion by saying, 'I'll take a Chevvy.' And now no lip-readers go to Colossal-Epic theatres. So I shrug my shoul-

ders, lose some money, and figure you deserve a good time.

"All that I forgive, Valentine. But a dozen times I begged you should let me insure your face for a million, and you figure it's just a gag and turn thumbs down. Losing a million, that I can't forgive! You're through, August!"

Valentine got to his feet slowly. "Aren't you forgetting our contract?"

"You're forgetting it, Valentine," Epic said, a hard smile on his face. "Some sense of humor you got. When we sign you up at 3 G a week, you laughed so much over all the 'face' publicity you had your face put under contract—not you. We're used to screwballs, so we agreed. So—no face, no contract. Tomorrow, I tear it up."

Valentine stood for a moment, wondering. Then he shrugged. It was true enough. He'd had a good time at Epic's expense; now that he was in trouble, he couldn't expect the producer to worry about getting him out of it.

He replaced the bandages and glasses, then turned and went out of the door.

The thing to do was get the film from Coma and develop it. Success without a head—well, people have a prejudice against hiring men without heads.

Valentine took the subway. He'd always had a good memory for odors, and the right station had an unusually sour smell. He got off and went out, to see grey streaks beginning in the sky. It would be light soon. He walked rapidly in the direction of the road where he'd met Coma, skirting the all-night drug-store carefully.

He found the spot, all right—footmarks still showed where he'd jumped. There were wide, empty lots for blocks around. Hanging around wouldn't do him any good. He walked back toward civilization.

A milkman driving a horse and wagon clattered down the street. Valentine waved an arm, and the man stopped. He didn't seem excited about the bandages—but then, this was Brooklyn.

"What's on your mind, Charlie?" the milkman asked.

"I'm trying to locate a man named Coma—Professor Coma. Man with a nose like one of your milk bottles."

The milkman thought it over. "Beats me," he said. "There ain't no Coma on my route, and I don't remember no schnoz like you tell. You sure he lives around here?"

"No," Valentine admitted. "That's just it. I met him here, but I don't know where he lives. Well, thanks anyhow."

"Anytime, Charlie," the milkman said. He started off, then stopped the horse. "Say, tell you what you do. Inquire in that grocery down the street. Owner knows everything about everybody around here. He don't open for an hour, though."

"I'll wait," Valentine decided. "Thanks again."

He started to walk down the block.

"Hey, Charlie," the milkman said.

"Yes?"

"This guy Coma. He the guy that wallopéd up your face like that?"

"No," Valentine said. "It got caught between two ferry boats."

The milkman nodded wisely. "Same thing happened to me once. Well, hope you find him."

Just after six o'clock, a little,

sharp-faced man came hurrying up to the store, a set of keys in his hand. He stopped at sight of Valentine and moved back a step.

"No harm meant, friend," Valentine said. "I'm just trying to locate an old friend, and the milkman said you'd know where he is."

"Oh," the little man said, expelling a deep breath. "Oh. This friend of yours—what's his name?"

"Coma," Valentine said. "Professor Alexander Granham Coma. He's a little fellow with a big nose."

"Coma? Coma? Nope, mister—there's no Coma around here."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Look, mister," the little man said with dignity. "This is the only grocery in the entire neighborhood. Used to be another, but he sold cheap stuff and went outa business. We carry only the best—everything fresh. Well, there's no Coma. If he lives in the neighborhood, he eats—and if he eats, he'd trade here."

"I see," Valentine said. "Much obliged."

That seemed to settle that. Then Valentine shrugged. He went into a little candy store, flipped open the Brooklyn telephone book, and looked under the C's. Coma was listed.

Valentine asked directions from the man behind the counter, then found the place three blocks away. It was a cottage, separated from a string of identical cottages by a large lot. Valentine knocked. No answer. He knocked again. Still no answer. Finally he tried the knob, and the door swung open.

He entered a long hall and looked around. There was a faint glimmer of light in a room at the back, and he walked toward it. The door was

open. Coma stood in front of a table heaped with bottles, glasses, and shallow trays. The shades were drawn.

"Well," said Coma, without looking up. "Come in, Mr. August, come in."

Valentine walked in.

"You were foolish to ask the milkman and the grocer," Coma said. "I gave up eating two years ago. Filthy habit. Get energy right out of the air easier."

Valentine lifted an eyebrow. "I suppose you saw everything from here?"

"Naturally. Telescopic X-Ray vision. Learned that years ago, before I took up serious work."

"Listen, Coma," Valentine began. Then he choked. There was a stack of films in plain view on the table. "Uh, er—I've come here to plead with you. How can I succeed without a head? Who'd hire me? I mean besides you?"

"I can't say," Coma answered. "That's your trouble. I've made an experiment, and I intend to stick to it."

Valentine stared downward covertly. There was an envelope marked V. August—head lying on top of the table.

"All right," Valentine said hoarsely. "Forget it. I can see you won't change your mind." He leaned forward and said winningly, "But you can satisfy my curiosity about this invention. That won't hurt your experiment. How do you develop your films, for instance?"

The glint of the inventor appeared in Coma's eyes. "Umm, that shouldn't hurt. And it's so simple. Just pure alcohol. That dissolves the binding

colloids, and the positive matter is automatically attracted to the opposite polarity of the same value. Positive is stronger than negative—so you're back to normal. Only it has to be absolutely pure alcohol. Otherwise, you get freak results—the congruity between that positive matter and its mate in negative form may be seriously imbalanced, and without proper valence, the loose positive matter might go anywhere. Like to see me do it—I've got some cat films I want to develop."

"Thanks," Valentine said. He lifted his fist and brought it down on the Professor's head, letting Coma sink gently to the floor. Valentine scooped up the envelope, and looked at the film. He couldn't tell. It was just a rather thick oblong piece of black celluloid. Still. . .

"Meaow!" Something rubbed against his leg, and Valentine jumped. He looked down, as the rubbing continued, but there was nothing there. His fingers found soft fur, though, and he started to explore. One of the cats Coma had mentioned, probably.

But there was no time for that. He dropped the film into his pocket and left. Now for some pure alcohol.

But where? The drug-store where he'd stolen the bandages was the only one around, and that was out. And it would be torture to wait until he could get back up-town. The suspense would kill him. Then he grinned. There was a bar and grill down the block, with its door open, and a man in a dirty apron was sweeping some dirt into the street.

Bars sell alcoholic beverages; maybe there was some pure alcohol

around. It was possible, considering the weird concoctions customers were always asking made up.

The man in the dirty apron looked Valentine over with dull eyes, and went on sweeping.

"Up sort of late aren't you?" Valentine asked.

"Live behind the store," the man said, "Place ain't no goldmine. Why—any objections?"

"None at all," Valentine assured him. "I'm a potential customer. Do you happen to have any pure alcohol to sell?"

The man sighed. "I got ulcers, bum feet, bankruptcy, lousy stock and rheumatism. Now I got fool questions. You get that at a drugstore. Couple blocks down."

"I can't," Valentine said. "I—I have a phobia—pharmaceutophobia, it's called. Don't you have *any* pure alcohol around?"

The man shrugged. "Mister, I wouldn't be surprised. I even found a bottle of uncut whiskey yesterday. Go ahead and look around, if you want—but don't go sticking no bottles in your coat; I'm keeping my eye on you from here."

Valentine went behind the bar and began digging at the mountain-high piles of bottles. It was hot work, and heat was beginning to come up the pipes. Valentine peeled off his coat and jacket in five minutes, but it didn't help. Absent-mindedly, he reached up and began to unravel his bandages.

He did it while scanning the piles, and didn't realize they were off until he heard a siren-like howl from the doorway. He turned to see the

store-owner staring at him, frozen to the broom.

"No head!" the bartender shrieked. "No head! He ain't got no head!" He shrieked once more and took off with the broom dragging between his legs. Valentine expected him to soar on it or fall over it, but he vanished in a haze of speed. Then Valentine went back to his digging.

It was still hot, and growing hotter. By the time he reached the bottom—with no pure alcohol in sight—he felt as if his invisible tongue were hanging out. He reached for the last bottle and scowled at it. It was beer, as far from pure alcohol as anything could be. He started to put it down—and then thought better of it.

He uncapped it expertly, placed it where his lips should be, and drank deeply. It tasted right, somehow. He excavated another beer and gave it the same treatment.

He was on his eighth bottle when he heard the door open. He snatched his bottle and crouched behind the counter, but it wasn't the owner. It was a tall, lean, red-headed man wearing evening dress, complete with tails. Valentine was only mildly surprised—he wasn't in a position to feel too critical of another's appearance.

He felt gay and adventurous by then. There was a newspaper on the counter, and he snatched it up into a position to conceal his lack of head. "What's yours, Charlie?" he asked, taking a note from the milkman.

"Open kinda early, aren't you?" asked the red-headed man, speaking with careful distinctness.

"Val's Bar and Grill is always

open," Valentine answered, opening another bottle.

The red-headed man was impressed. "I hear sucking sounds. What you drinking?"

"Beer. Nice fresh, foamy beer."

"Beer. I'll have some," the man said. "I've tried rye, rum, scotch, anisette, gin, bourbon, absynthe, tequila, and port wine. Give me some beer."

Valentine gave him a bottle and they finished in a dead heat. Valentine opened two more, and then two more.

His mood was becoming playful by the fourteenth drink, though. With a quick movement, he dropped the newspaper and waited for his customer to shriek and rush out.

The red-headed man stared owlishly at him. "You haven't got a head," he said casually, finishing his beer. "Another beer."

"I certainly haven't," Valentine agreed sadly. He resisted a sudden impulse to weep. "What'll my friends back in Hollywood think when they hear about it?"

"You from Hollywood?" asked the red-headed man, pleased. He tried to slap Valentine fraternally on the shoulder, missed twice, and gave up. "I'm from Hollywood, too. Name's Design. Here on a vacation—drink too much in Hollywood. Used to live around here before I became a success."

Valentine disregarded him. "I haven't got a head," he said. "No head at all, no head at all." There was a song like that, but he couldn't remember it. He took the film from his pocket and placed it carefully on

the bar. "You know, Design, my head's right in this film."

The red-headed man peered at the film. "Right in that film?"

"Right in it," said Valentine.

"I don't see any head," Design said.

"You're drunk, that's why," Valentine told him. "So drunk you don't even see my head in this film. Well, it's there, all right, and if I had some pure alcohol I'd prove it. Pure alcohol would make my head come right out of that film."

"Aw, forget it," the red-headed man said. "Probably isn't so hot to look at anyhow. You've got a nice voice, though." He paused suddenly, his eyes open wide. "Your voice!" he howled thunderously.

Valentine jumped. "What's the matter with you?"

"But, your voice—don't you understand. It's the one I've been hunting over a year—and I didn't realize it until just now!" He didn't sound sober, but at least soberer. "Listen, you've got exactly the dignified, unemotional tone I want. Do you—do you have a job out in Hollywood?"

"Not at the moment," Valentine answered.

"Wonderful!" Design said. "Glorious! I can't believe my luck. Listen, how would you like to go to work—?" He paused suddenly, seeing that Valentine wasn't listening. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to show you something," Valentine said. He took a cocktail glass filled with beer and handed it to Design. "I'll bet you the price of your drinks you can't balance that on one finger and sing *Mammy* at the same time."

Design looked annoyed for a mo-

ment, and then his sporting instinct got the better of him. "I'll take that bet," he said.

He placed the cocktail glass carefully on his index finger and began to sing. It went well for a while—until he arrived at the final "Ma-a-a-my." Then his arms swung out sentimentally and the glass flipped into the air and smashed on the bar. Beer flowed brownly in every direction.

Valentine laughed. "I knew it. Everybody does it. You just can't sing that part without sticking out your arms like Jolson. It happens every time. . . ."

He stopped suddenly and stared at the film. Design looked at it, too.

"I think we wet your film," he said.

Valentine steadied himself on the bar. He felt sick. "Beer. It—it isn't pure alcohol. The film's ruined"

There was a flat silence. Valentine picked the film up, wiping it off as best he could. But there were two spots that were thoroughly damp. He shoved it glumly back into the envelope and into his pocket.

And the sharp, chilling whine of a bullet cut through his gloom. A sun-rayed hole appeared in the mirror behind him! The store-owner stood in the rear, an ancient musket in his hands.

"I'm going to shoot you, nightmare," he said, grinning hideously at Valentine. "Maybe I'm nuts from drinking my own stock—but I'm gonna put a bullet through you . . . Then if you don't go away, I'm crazy."

He fired again, and another hole appeared in the mirror.

"Duck!" Valentine said. He pushed

Design to the floor on the other side of the bar. Then carefully he filled a glass with beer and flipped it. Beer splashed into the store-owner's eyes. He dropped his musket and began to claw at his face.

"Let's go!" Valentine shouted, snatching up his disguise. He leaped from behind the bar, straight-armed the store-owner, and went through the door, with Design right behind him.

"No, you idiot!" Valentine shouted. "You go one way, I'll go the other. Scram!"

Design stopped running. "But your voice—how am I going to reach you?"

Valentine didn't answer. He didn't know what the man was talking about, and that didn't matter, anyway. Nothing much mattered when you got right down to it. But he was lucky. He ran almost a block without meeting anybody, then slipped into an alley and replaced his coverings. That done, he headed for the subway.

Lorelei answered the door, and Valentine didn't wait to be invited in. He pushed her inside and walked in after her.

"Look," he said. "In about an hour I'm going to be floating in the East River. But before I jump off a bridge, I've come to say goodbye and hold you in my arms. Go ahead and scream if you want, but now—come here!"

He reached for her. She didn't scream or attempt to slug him. Instead, her warmth clung to him.

"You've been hurt," she said. "I was so afraid—when I thought, I knew something would happen to

you after you called up. I've been so worried. You sounded so drunk and helpless. . . ."

"Lorelei," Valentine said gently, "I've been hurt, all right—but not after I called. This happened before. That's what I tried to tell you."

"Before you called? But it couldn't—you were so drunk, and . . . Oh, darling, I couldn't sleep—I was worrying about you so much. I knew then that I loved you—that I've always loved you."

Valentine felt as though a bomb had exploded inside him, spreading a wonderful, happy warmth all throughout him. She loved him—he'd just heard her say it. "Lorelei," he said, "everything I told you on the phone was true. Fantastic, but true. Stand back, honey."

It didn't take long. A flip, a twist and a twirl, and the bandages were off, freeing his lips. She didn't faint. She swayed a little and her lovely face turned several delicate shades of pink and red, but she took it. Then she was in his arms, held close, and he was kissing her and thinking that even without a head this was a pretty wonderful world.

"It doesn't matter," Lorelei told him, when he finished his account. "There's nothing we can do about it, so it doesn't matter. You can wear bandages in public, and we'll still be happy together . . ."

She paused, and he looked at her questioningly. She hesitated, then went on. "Only . . . only neither of us has a job now, darling. Epic—well, he thinks I'm good only for writing scripts for you; and with you dropped. . . . And I'll bet you haven't saved, either."

It brought him back to reality,

and he shook his head. "No. And getting a job in my condition . . . umm, some fellow wanted to hire me today, though. Don't know what kind—he was probably just drunk. He kept talking about my voice. . . how he'd been searching for it for a year. His name was Design."

Lorelei stared at him. "Valentine!" she said. "Not *Dennis Design*?"

"I don't know. He didn't say. Tall, good-looking fellow with red hair. Is he the man you're talking about?"

"Yes, honey, yes!" She kissed him excitedly. "Valentine, he's the head of Design Productions—the cartoon comedy tycoon. He probably wants you to play the voice of Claudio the Cat."

"Huh?"

"Haven't you heard of Claudio the Cat? They're to be full-length comedies—with a budget for each as big as an A production! Isn't it wonderful? You won't need a face, darling!"

"Lovely," Valentine admitted doubtfully. "Only I don't know where Design is staying. And a cat—I never tried animal imitations. Maybe I can't meow."

"Then go ahead—try it," she said.

Valentine threw back his lack of head, took a deep breath, and tried to think of fish, garbage cans, and female felines. Then he meowed. It was a magnificent volume of sound—but no cat was ever going to recognize it. It was something between a bleat and a bray, with a Harvard accent.

Lorelei's shoulders drooped, and he nodded glumly. Then she shrugged. "Maybe he won't need you to meow. Maybe they can dub it in.

Anyhow, we can try. And Winchell will know where Design is."

She called while Valentine put on his bandages. Design, it seemed was in the same hotel, on the second floor. She patted his bandages into better order, braced herself, and they left.

If it worked, it might not be bad. If he was doomed to a headless existence, he might as well make the most of it. Being Claudio the Cat was a pleasant a way of earning a living as any. But those meows—he practiced a few more on the way down, and they were a little better, he fancied. But the elevator man looked on them with faint approval and Lorelei's face wasn't happy.

Design answered their knock without enthusiasm, holding his head. Lorelei introduced Valentine, but Design didn't recognize him. "Been in an accident, Mr. August?" he asked. "Your head looks like mine feels."

"Sort of an accident," Valentine said. "Hangover?"

"Hangover—and kicking myself," Design said glumly. "For a year I've been hunting a voice. Then I find it—and lose it again. Found him in a bar, but I was too woozy to chase him when he ran, and I can't even remember what he looks like." He shook his head ruefully. "I must have been tight—I keep thinking the guy had no head."

They were safe inside the suite now. "He hasn't," Valentine said, and removed the bandages.

Design leaped into the air, gasped, and staggered shakily into a chair. "It's harder to take when you're sober," he said.

"Well, you'll have to get used to it if I'm to work for you. My head's gone, along with my contract to Colossal-Epic. I'm all yours."

Design lifted the phone. "My lawyers New York representative will be here with a contract in half an hour—matching your salary at Colossal-Epic." He looked at Valentine again, and shuddered. "But don't explain that—I wouldn't believe it anyway."

Valentine looked toward Lorelei happily—and she stared at him and cried out sharply. "Your face—Valentine, your face—it's coming back. . . ."

Valentine whirled to a mirror on the wall. He could feel himself trembling, as though an electric current were going through him. It was true. He could see his face filling in as he looked, uncannily, like a movie fade-in. It went on slowly, but he could already make out the outlines.

He lit a cigarette fumblingly and stared at himself. "I don't get it," he said. "But I'm not questioning it. And I'm still sticking with you, Design. Epic may want to validate my contract again, but—well, maybe I was a ham—and we'll get out of it."

The door opened. "Certainly you'll stick to Mr. Design," Professor Coma said from the doorway. "That's the only reason I just developed your film at my laboratory. You're a success now."

He took something invisible from his arm, and handed it to Lorelei. "And I've brought back your cat, July, Miss Lee. August has its film in his pocket—and here's some pure alcohol to develop it."

"But . . . You mean that was

July's film?" Valentine asked. "But—it's ruined. See?"

Coma glanced at it. "Beer, eh? Well, you may get some odd results —maybe a little of July won't come through where it should. But he'll live." He smiled. "I should have prevented your taking it, perhaps, but I figured you were young and deserved a little fun. The blow didn't hurt me, you know. I just slipped partly into another dimension." He smiled again, bowed gravely to Lorelei, and prepared to leave.

Valentine caught him. "Wait a minute. If you developed the film back in your laboratory, how did you get here so fast?"

"I flew naturally," said Coma, and disappeared.

Valentine stood staring, waving the film and bottle of alcohol. Then, shaking his head, he pushed the film into the bottle, leaning over to inspect it. He couldn't see anything, but fumes came up, catching at his throat and sending twinges down to his coccyx. He gasped, swallowed, and watched a striped tigercat appear slowly at Lorelei's feet.

And then Valentine yelped, stared again, and made groping gestures toward a spot on his anatomy usually reserved for sitting. July was apparently complete—except for his tail. And Valentine was suddenly more than complete. He stared ruefully at Lorelei, started to sag, and then shrugged it off. After all, if she could put up with a headless man, this shouldn't matter. Then he saw her puzzlement give place to amusement, and he knew it was all right.

"The beer," he told her. "Coma warned me impurities. . . ."

Design's lips moved soundlessly. "Don't tell me. Don't tell me anything," he said finally. You've got your head, I've got the voice I need. That's enough—or, wait. There's just one thing more. I haven't heard you meow."

Lorelei's face started to whiten, but she held herself firmly. "It's—well, different," she began. "It has a personality. . . ."

But Valentine knew it was useless to explain. With things as crazy as they were, it might get by, but there was no use explaining. He threw back his head, opened his mouth, and let it slide. It began at his heels, worked all the way up, and came forth with full momentum. It was magnificent—a purring, howling meow; a meow to end all meows.

July looked up, opened his mouth, and gave vent to silence. Then the

cat made a beeline under a couch and lay there hating the man who had somehow stolen his vocal cords and his meow.

Design beamed, Lorelei came into Valentine's arms. Valentine thought about the future happily, reminding himself to hold beer in special favor from now on. Then he couldn't resist the impulse.

He threw back his head and let it go again. It was even better; it had all the cultured development of his own voice with the results of all July's practice down back alleys. It was a superb meow, a meow to end all meows.

Somewhere in the distance, an alley cat joined in, to be followed by others. But their voices were a bit envious, as if they knew there could be only one *Claudius the Cat*.

The End

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Charles A. Crayne

1050 N. Ridgewood Pl.

Hollywood, California 90038

The Wrong People

By **RALPH ROBIN**

It must be understood that when Ralph Robin wrote this story, he was not trying to illustrate any sociological trends; he was not pointing a finger at any particular type of person — agreeable, disagreeable, or otherwise. He was not working off any resentments or holding anyone up before the spot-light of clinical analysis. He was merely having himself some fun and we hope that you will have some fun too, in reading what he wrote.

DR. CHAPPELLEY had the sad and put-upon face of a man who never thinks a generous thought and his wife had the perky face of a woman of the same character.

They were a good pair. The *Praeternaturalis argenteus*, as it called itself, should never have dropped in.

Dr. Chappelley was a dentist.

Dr. Chappelley did not approve of:

1. The Bureau of Internal Revenue.
2. Salad with olive oil.

3. His assistant.
4. Foreigners.

5. An exodontist named Dr. Magpie.

6. People richer than he.
7. People poorer than he.
8. His wife.

Mrs. Chappelley did not approve of everything and everybody her husband did not approve of, except herself. In addition, she did not approve of pretty girls, the cleaning woman, and Dr. Chappelley.

One morning Mrs. Chappelley was at the kitchen sink tending

the garbage disposer, which was grinding away orange peels and egg shells and some old leftovers from the refrigerator. Her back was turned to Dr. Chappelley. He was having his breakfast and the morning paper at the breakfast bar.

Dr. Chappelley yelled above the noise of the garbage disposer, "I see in the paper they're investigating another one of those atomic scientists. Physicist or chemist or something."

"That girl next door," Mrs. Chappelley answered. "She didn't get in till four o'clock this morning. And then she stayed in the car with her boy friend till dawn."

Mrs. Chappelley had the common opinion of her kind that moral lapses always take place in the dark of night.

"I wouldn't trust any of those long-haired scientists," Dr. Chappelley yelled. "They're all subversive."

The garbage disposer roared happily as it crushed a piece of bone.

"I'd like to be her mother for just one hour," Mrs. Chappelley screamed.

"There was this physics professor when I was going to college. He admitted openly — right there in class — that he was going to vote for Norman Thomas. Back in 1928."

"I'd teach her a thing or two," Mrs. Chappelley screamed.

Dr. Chappelley yelled: "That was the only time I can remember that I knew what he was talking about. When he talked about physics, he could just as well have been saying, 'Wooggy wooggy woog-a-bunk vector,' for all I got out of it. I barely passed with a D."

It occurred to Dr. Chappelley that this might reflect on his intelligence, so he added, "He didn't know how to teach, and besides he was a long-haired . . ."

"I will not tolerate language like that in my house," said Mrs. Chappelley, showing that she paid some attention to her husband's remarks after all.

"The sugar bowl's empty," Dr. Chappelley howled.

Mrs. Chappelley turned to fill it, and howled louder. "What is that?"

"What is what?" asked Dr. Chappelley, who now was deep in his favorite columnist, Eastlake Paranoid.

"That," said Mrs. Chappelley.

"What?" asked Dr. Chappelley.

Dr. Chappelley at last tore himself from Paranoid's interesting theory that all public libraries should be closed because they entice innocent children into reading books when they ought to be out selling newspapers and shining shoes and becoming red-blooded Americans.



Illustrator: Ed Emsh

Then Dr. Chappelley saw what his wife saw. He saw it sitting on the next stool of the breakfast bar.

(There were, by the way, four stools at the bar. Two were for the Chappelleys' two sons, who were at the university. They were studying respectively funeral direction and supermarket administration.)

The creature on the stool smiled politely.

Dr. Chappelley adjusted his glasses and carefully examined it. It had long arms and long legs and its feet were like hands. It was covered with a very fine silvery fur that seemed to have a life of its own. Ripples passed through the fur across the creature's body, making light or dark paths as sunlight from the window was reflected or absorbed.

Across the creature's furry face ideas swept. Large eyes looked out at the world with wonder but with confidence. Its ears, which were bare, twitched to catch the sounds of life.

"It's a monkey," Dr. Chappelley announced.

"It's disgusting," Mrs. Chappelley said. "You know I don't like monkeys."

"You really shouldn't talk about me as if I weren't here," the creature said gently. "Besides, I'm not a monkey."

For some reason this mild rebuke terrified the Chappelleys.

Mrs. Chappelley backed against the sink. If she could have, she would have backed through it. She reached behind her and turned off the garbage disposer, no doubt to regain a feeling of controlling events. Dr. Chappelley, on the other side of the breakfast bar, had jumped from his stool and backed into the dining room.

"You're both behaving very oddly," said the creature. "But that is characteristic of your species."

Dr. Chappelley decided that this was one of the occasions when there was no harm in a drink, sociable or not. He picked up the decanter of decorative port, which had been sitting on the buffet for three years, and took a long swig right out of the decanter.

Like all near-teetotalers, Dr. Chappelley had an exaggerated idea of the effect of alcohol; so he felt the effect immediately. He strode back to the breakfast bar and said indignantly, "Since you're so smart, tell me what kind of animal you are if you're not a monkey."

"Oh, if you want a name, I'll give you one according to your system. *Praeternaturalis argenteus* will do very well."

"It won't do at all," Dr. Chappelley said. Abruptly he changed the subject. "How did you get in here?" he demanded.

"I took advantage of a twist in space-time, very loosely speaking."

You see, when you said, 'Wooggy and-so-on vector,' you caused a specific disturbance of the molecules of the atmosphere that started a series of causative phenomena of which the twist in space-time was an epiphénoménon."

"A fine fairy tale," said Mrs. Chappelley, who wasn't going to be less brave than her husband. Anyway, she now thought that this was just some kind of a monkey that a mad scientist had taught how to talk. She knew all about mad scientists from the comic books her sons left lying around during their vacations from the university.

"A fairy tale," the *Praeter-naturalis argenteus*, as it called itself, repeated amiably. "That is not far from the truth. You remember the potent words in your fairy tales and folklore. Rumpelstiltskin. Open sesame. The nine magical names of God.

"Your mythmakers sensed what words can do. Sometimes people by accident blurt out words of power — as your husband did — and have surprising experiences."

"That's what my wife meant," said Dr. Chappelley.

"I did not —"

"Be quiet, dear. When I was a little boy, I loved fairy tales," Dr. Chappelley lied. "As I understand you, you are something like a good fairy or a jinni, though of

course you have given a clear scientific explanation."

Whatever his opinion of scientists, Dr. Chappelley respects Science.

The *praeternaturalis* opened its mouth. But it didn't get a chance to say anything.

Dr. Chappelley went on: "Now that I've said the magic words, I suppose that you will give me anything I ask for. First of all, I want a new Cadillac —"

"— with built-in television," Mrs. Chappelley added. She hasn't given up the mad-scientist theory, but she wasn't taking any chances. "And a new house — a bigger one," she said. "A palatial residence electronically designed for living, with an old-fashioned respectful couple to do the housework and cooking."

"Don't interrupt. I was coming to the house. Put it on the list," he ordered the *praeternaturalis*. "And fix me up with a simple but comfortable lodge in beautiful scenic country excelling in hunting and fishing."

Once more the *praeternaturalis* tried to speak, but Dr. Chappelley rattled on. "It will take some time to work out all our needs in detail. As a stopgap, I'd like to have some spending money right now, fixed so the Bureau of Internal Revenue can't get at it to support a lot of shiftless no-goods, especially foreigners, who won't work for what

they want. Say a million dollars to start with."

"I am afraid there has been a misunderstanding," the praeter-naturalis said at last. "I am not a good fairy or a jinni out of a bottle or a leprechaun. I have come from my world, very loosely speaking, not to give you things but to give you words."

"Words?" Dr. Chappelley's round face was trembling with his disappointment. But he realized quickly that he might as well get what he could; so he brought his face under control. "You mean a magic phrase that can change lead into gold, or something like that? That would be useful, too. Will you have some port? — I am not a drinker, really, but I don't think there is any harm in an occasional sociable drink. Or some coffee? Get the nice praeter-naturalis some coffee, dear."

"I'll make him some fresh," said Mrs. Chappelley. She turned the dials on the Koffee-Master.

The praeter-naturalis politely held up its hands to Mrs. Chappelley as she set a clean cup on the breakfast bar, and it politely held up its feet to Dr. Chappelley, who was pouring a glass of port.

"No, thank you, both. Caffein and alcohol don't affect us. When we want to be stimulated, we pour an alkaline solution on our fur. When we want to relax, we use an acid solution."

"How interesting," Dr. Chappelley said, "Physiology fascinates me. You were speaking of some words you were going to give us."

"Of course. We have an advanced technology of words; and a few of us — although our friends call us sentimental — have been wanting for a long time to use our skill to do something for your species. But we haven't been able to visit you. Very loosely speaking, we have to come from the outside and a twist in space-time has to be generated inside. Fortunately, you generated one."

"It was nothing." Dr. Chappelley cocked his head to show his interest in the next thing the praeter-naturalis had to say. He also uncovered his shining teeth, which his assistant, a Miss Jacqueline Smith, had to clean every three months on her own time.

"Our worders make at their wordbenches not only words with mass-energy effects — your magic phrase for turning lead into gold would be an example — but also words with moral effects. On the whole, we prefer to make the latter. I am not denying the mass-energy basis of psychological processes, but I am simplifying a distinction. Do you follow me?"

Dr. Chappelley nodded suspiciously. He sneaked a shrewd look into the wide eyes of the praeter-naturalis, and gazed heavenward.

"If Mrs. Chappelley and I had a way of making gold, we could do so much good for the poor unfortunates of this world. If we had — also — a word to reform evildoers and heal sick minds, we could do even more good."

"Juvenile delinquents," said Mrs. Chappelley.

"Broken homes," said Dr. Chappelley.

"Alcoholics," said Mrs. Chappelley.

"What are the words?" asked Dr. Chappelley.

"They are a series of connected words," said the praeternaturalis, "as follows: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'"

The Chappelleys were disturbed.

"Those aren't words to make gold?" Dr. Chappelley asked.

"No."

"They're not moral either," Mrs. Chappelley said. "Those words won't do anything for juvenile delinquents, broken homes, and alcoholics. If anything, they'll encourage them."

"They're subversive," Dr. Chappelley said, deciding that nothing useful would be got out of the creature. Dr. Chappelley was a man of principle and always said what he thought, when he couldn't lose anything.

Now the praeternaturalis was disturbed, which it showed by bending down one bare ear. "I don't understand. Our worders assured me that the words were specially designed for *Homo sapiens* and would be very effective."

"Not on a red-blooded homo Americanus!" Dr. Chappelley cried.

"That remains to be seen. Perhaps you two are an inadequate sample. If you will excuse me, I will wander around and try them on some other specimens."

"You mean you are going out and preach that immoral, subversive gibberish?"



"I am sentimental."

Mrs. Chappelley, while taking part in the conversation, had been busying herself with little housewifely tasks on the other side of the breakfast bar. Filling salt cellars. Wiping the inside of a jelly lid. Pouring white vinegar — the Chappelleys drenched all their food with it — into a cruet

She was holding the open bottle. She reached across the bar and poured a quart of vinegar on the *praeternaturalis*' head.

The *praeternaturalis* said, "Wooggy wooggy . . ." and slumped sound asleep on the bar like an old drunkard.

"I remembered that vinegar was an acid solution," Mrs. Chappelley said proudly.

"What the hell did you do that for?"

"I won't be sworn at, and it was my simple duty."

Dr. Chappelley's lower lip was shaking. "It's liable to wake up angry, and after all it may have powers we don't know anything about. Besides, I think it was calling for help before it fell asleep. It started to say, 'Wooggy wooggy woog-a-bunk —'"

"Shut up," Mrs. Chappelley screamed, just in time. They looked at each other for a while, and she said: "You remember those knives Uncle Walter gave us for Christmas? I was trying

out the new electric sharpener on them only last night."

"But it's almost human. It can talk and everything."

Mrs. Chappelley opened a drawer and pulled out a long black case.

Dr. Chappelley spoke more to himself than to his wife. "When you look at its fur and its feet, it is no better than an animal; and it doesn't even wear clothes. And if you do try to stretch a point and think of it in the same way as a human being, then it's an immoral, subversive alien. We would only be doing our duty; our clearly apparent duty."

"Stop talking and take this." Mrs. Chappelley handed him a knife.

The creature's silvery fur rippled and glinted, but more slowly in sleep. Dr. Chappelley nervously pushed back his starched cuffs and stabbed the *Praternaturalis argenteus*, as it called itself, through the neck.

Its fur moved yet more slowly, and was still: like the fur of a limp cat in a gutter.

"We should have remembered to put newspapers on the floor," Mrs. Chappelley said.

"What shall we do with it?" Dr. Chappelley asked.

"Men are so helpless around a kitchen," Mrs. Chappelley said sharply.

She turned on the garbage disposer.

THE PRINCESS OF MARS

by Edgar Rice Burroughs



PRINCESS OF MARS is perhaps the best—and is surely the best known—science fiction novel that Burroughs ever wrote. Now here it is—for the very first time—in the form of a poem. Or is it a parody? Or is it a condensation, or even a review? You will just have to read it and find out for yourself.

by CHARLES R. TANNER

THE PRINCESS OF MARS.

by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

(Of all the stories in the land,
Least liable to bore us
Is that of Captain Carter and
The lovely Dejah Thoris.
It's held its own with boys and men
Since 'way back there in 1910.)

Captain John Carter, C.S.A., prospecting in the west,
Beheld his partner, Powell, get an arrow in the vest.
He turned his horse around and ran, pursued by painted braves;
With whoop-de-doo, they chased him through the canyons and the caves.

He hid within a cave at last, a dismal place and haunted;
The Indians came, a-searching him, but even they were daunted
By something in the cavern dim—then Carter got a sniff
Of something old and dead and cold, and he was frozen stiff!

He lay for hours within the cave, as still and cold as ice;
He tried to wiggle, tried to squirm, he tried to move—no dice.
At last he felt a funny click—by every Grecian god! he
Jumped up and gee! He found that he was standing by his body!

Don't get me wrong, no ghost was he; he still was just as stolid
And grim and stern and handsome as before, and just as solid.
He stepped outside the cave and looking up beheld the stars.
A moment's spark of cold and dark, and *Bam!* He's up on Mars!

The Martians known as Tharks were quite the strangest ever seen;
With walrus tusks and four long arms, fifteen feet high, and green.
They lived like desert Arabs, but instead of sheep and goats,
Up there on Mars there's zitudars, calots and banths and thoats.

John Carter killed a warrior, and standing by the carcass,
He saw a Thark walk up and say, "Good work! My name's Tars Tarkas.
"No one can have a friend on Mars, no one can have a wife;
"But keep it quiet, friend, and I will be your friend for life."

One day, while Carter cleaned his guns and hummed a little ditty,
An airship from far Helium came sailing o'er the city.
They shot it down 'mid squeals and yells, a wild and savage chorus;
And there inside was Helium's pride—the lovely Dejah Thoris!

Oh "who is Sylvia, what is she; that all our swains commend her?"
And who is Trojan Helen, e'en with Venus to defend her?
And who is Shakespeare's *Juliet*? These ladies all were quinces.
Not one would dare to risk compare with Captain Carter's princess.

John Carter as a fighter was a superman for certain.
John Carter as a lover—Let us quickly draw the curtain.
He stammered, stammered, stumbled—he was in a dreadful state;
And only two clear words got through; he muttered, "Let's escape."

"So forth from Alexandria—" (Beg pardon, that's a quote),
So forth from their imprisonment they rode upon a thoat.
Across the dead sea bed they fled, past many an ancient ruin,
Till, in dismay, they saw the next day the green men were pursuin'.

The green men came up fast so she fled upon a thoat.
John Carter told her, "Go. I'll stay behind and be the goat."
But when the Martians got up close, he saw they were no Tharks.
These savage goons were all Warhoons, a damsite worse than sharks.

They took him to their city and they put him in a cell.
He found that they had captured a red Helium man as well—
A noble friendly fellow by the name of Kanton Kan—
And it really burned him up when he had to fight the man.

The Warhoons like a battle, so they made their prisoners fight
From early in the morning until pretty late at night
And then they turned the last one loose, so Carter got a plan.
"It's up to you to see me through," he said to Kanton Kan.

So Kanton killed a dozen men, and Carter killed a score,
Then turned upon each other when there weren't any more;
And Kanton faked a sudden thrust and Carter fell "defeated",
And lay there, stark, till after dark and then got up and beat it.

Across the dead sea bottom Carter quickly made his way,
And came across a great big building, late the following day.
An old man bade him welcome, saying, "Enter without fear,
"For I'm the cheese that makes the breeze that people breathe up here."

(You see, the planet Mars is old and hasn't got a bit
Of natural atmosphere and so they manufacture it.
They have to keep it secret from the whole blamed Martian race,
Or pretty soon some dumb Warhoon would try to raid the place.)

The old man flattered Carter and he made him stay for lunch
And said he had to spend the night, but Carter got a hunch
That this old boy would kill him just to keep his secret tight—
So with the dawn, J.C. was gone, continuing his flight.

Across the dead sea bottom (golly! here we go again!)
Came Carter to Zodanga where he joined the ruler's men.
And one day on the street he saw an old familiar pan.
"Well, knock me stiff," said Carter, "if it isn't Kanton Kan!"

Said Kanton Kan, "By Issus, you're a guy I'm glad to see.
"I've got a job to do and you can be a help to me.
"These fellows caught our princess fair, as from the Tharks she fled,
"And now the clown that runs the town insists that they be wed."

John Carter said, indignantly, "Well, whaddya think of that,
"I'll wallop these Zodangans till they don't know where they're at.
"The nerve of them! The princess is the girl who's won *my* heart.
"Them easy marks! I'll get the Tharks and take this place apart."

He leaped upon his thoat and rode, with Thark his journey's end.
Tars Tarkas was their ruler now; he said "Hello, my friend."
Said Carter, "I've a job for you, my friend, so do your duty,
"And in the end you'll get, my friend, a lot of loot and booty."

To make a long tale short—they smote Zodanga, hip and thigh;
The Tharks attacked them from the ground and Helium from the sky.
Zodanga lost its freedom and its ruler lost his life;
The Tharks got loot and wealth to boot—and Carter got his wife.

For ten long years, 'mid smiles and tears, he led the life of Reilly
As Dejah Thoris' husband. He was honored very highly.
And then, one day, he heard her say what threw him for a loss:
"Your loving wife would bet her life they've killed the air-plant boss!"

Said John, "Now that you mention it, it is quite stuffy here.
"I guess it's up to old J. C. to save the atmosphere."
He quickly called a flier and set off across the plain
And flew and flew till he came to the airplant once again.

He fixed the air-plant up, all right, the best that he could do,
But he was darned short-winded by the time that he got through.
He gazed up at the sky, beheld the planet of his birth—
A moment's spark of cold and dark, and *Bam!* he's back on earth!

* * * * *

Oh, Edgar Burroughs antedated Joyce by several years
In writing stories that go 'round in circles, it appears.
If I were old John Carter, I would sure be broken-hearted
To fight so much with Tharks and such, and wind up where I started.

Don't Miss

BRIAN W. ALDISS NEW NOVELET
SEND HER VICTORIOUS
In the JUNE AMAZING NOW ON SALE

FANTASY BOOKS

SUBSPACE EXPLORERS. By Edward E. Smith. pp278. (Canaveral Press, Inc. \$3.50)

reviewed by

CHARLES R. TANNER

If you are an avid collector of science fiction, or a specialist, collecting *all* of "Doc" Smith's work, you'll want this book. If you have never read any of "Doc's" earlier stuff, I suppose you might enjoy it. But if you have followed "Doc's" career from *Skylark of Space* to *Skylark Duquesne*, this tale is incredible. Not that the events in the story are incredible, that never would have bothered "Doc" or his readers, but incredible that "Doc" could have written it.

It starts out a good deal like *Tri-planetary* and it ends up something like *Children of the Lens*. And in between:

First Officer Carlyle Deston, Chief Electronicist of the Star-liner *Procyon* sees a girl on the star-liner, on page four, and on page five without any time passing, they are engaged and planning how to get married at once.

The girl is Barbara Warner, whose father owns *all* the oil in the universe, and is a member of a group of multi-billionaires who control everything.

Then the ship is wrecked and everybody is killed, but Deston and Barbara get back to earth all right, and pretty soon Barbara teaches Deston to be a "psionist" (a what?)

and we soon find out the nearly all of the nice, kind billionaire capitalists are psionists, and all the low, degraded laboring men are "heavily armed, heavy muscled hoodlums and plug-uglies."

Then they find out that the Communists, who have kept the Iron Curtain intact throughout all these years, have seized a planet way out in space somewhere and the happy millionaires have to conquer them and their cohorts, but they wipe them out all right and start to building a new race of supermen, and the story ends on a high note, with all the consumers happy and all the stupid, ignorant laboring men dead. Just what the difference is, between the consumers and the laboring men, deponent sayeth not.

There's a principle that all the good guys follow, called the Principle of Enlightened Self-Interest, which means that the rich guys get all they can from whoever they can, but if a bunch of laboring men try to get a raise, the rich guys have them all shot.

Unless one is a fanatic far-righter, he gets pretty tired of this long before he reaches the end of the book. And Doc's widely known inability to get his hero into any real trouble is made obvious again and again.

Doc was wonderful in the old days when he wrote his stories by himself, but as all fans know, he had

quite a little "help" in his later years, especially in devising his plots. And I wonder how much that "help" improved his stories?

The name of "Doc" Smith will certainly be famous as long as science fiction is read in this country, and that will be for a lot longer than we of today imagine, but he will not be known primarily as the author of *Subspace Explorers*.

I read the story at one sitting, because it was "Doc", and it still had his style and tricks of writing. Which taught me an awful lot, but after I had read it I had to admit that it wasn't the "Doc" Smith I had known

Revelations 10:10.

And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up, and it was, in my mouth, sweet as honey, and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

LOGAN'S RUN by William F. Nolan & George Clayton Johnson (Dial Press, \$3.95)

reviewed by

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

I recently witnessed a startling phenomenon, something straight out of the pages of *FANTASTIC*: a figure floating down the street about 10 feet above the sidewalk as I stood in front of my favorite local newsstand scouting the sci-fi section.

I recognized this Levitated Man!

"Bill Nolan!" I cried. "Bill! Isn't that you? What are you doing, wafting around up there?"

As tho from an Olympian height he dropped his gaze earthward and his voice drifted thru Cloud 9 like chords from an Aeolian harp. "Why,

I do believe that's you down there, Forry?"

Well, the story was that Nolan—half the team that authored *LOGAN'S RUN*—on top of having collected \$10,000 for a mere film *option* on the novel before it was even published, had a scant hour earlier epoxied a deal with MGM Studios to make a movie of the book for a cool \$100,000! Outbidding 11 other studios, directors, producers and overseas interests, George (the man with *THE POWER*) Pal had hooked his producer's mitts onto Hollywood's hottest new s.f. property!

If the bucks-office receipts of 2001: *A SPACE ODYSSEY* justify it, *LOGAN'S RUN* as well will be spectacularized in Cinerama!

I am proud as a pouter pigeon to have gone on record 10 weeks previous to this monetary s.f. motion picture milestone with the declaration that "the book is the most astonishing & absorbing sci-fi novel I have read in years."

What makes *Logan* run?

Ideas. Inventions. Actions. Reactions. Innovations. Extrapolations worthy of Frederik the Great and his late collaborator Kornbluth when creating their groovy *GRAVY PLANET*. Novacious yet comprehensible happenings. No New Wave novel, this; no *psychedeliKaleidoscopiConglomeration of ellesdisiackian yak-yak*; no. Nice clean clearcut uncluttered non-turd-word writing that rates a New Rave. The book might aptly be subtitled "Homer's *Odyssey*: 21st Century". Read it and see if you don't agree.

On a special shelf in my Sci-Fi

Foundation I display each of the Hugo-winning novels, the recently created Nebula novels, the International Fantasy Awards of the past and a few of my personal panchronic pets such as *THE WORLD BELOW*, *CHILDHOOD'S END* and *FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE*. I am not tarrying till the Hugo/Nebula awards are voted into reality this year: in my opinion (in my 42nd year of reading science fiction) *LOGAN'S RUN* should run away with one or the other and possibly both honors and so I have already added it to my All Star Shelf.

Buy the book, burn the jacket, smile nostalgically thru the longest dedication the world has ever known, read with racing eyes and pulsing corpuscles of the Knave Brew World as you suck Muscle, seek Sanctuary, go to Hell in subzero Fahrenheit 51 and in general reflag your flagging Sense of Wonder at an anti-adult Mondo Carne where everyone from youth in America to youth in Asia opts at 21 for euthanasia—everyone except those who defy tomorrow's mores and must run from the Sandmen.

Special note: Who but Nolan & Johnson would have had the consummate daring to introduce penguins at the North Pole? There is cranial croggling as the brain boggles at the ecological implications.

Read this book tout-de-suite or nextime I see you it will be with my stungun aimed at your tum-tum: trigger-treat.

THE WAY THINGS WORK, subtitled *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Technology* (Simon and Schuster, \$4.95)

It was our old friend, Dr. Asimov, who first brought this book to my attention. If any volume is unputdownable this one surely is—although it is not fiction. All meat and hardly any shell. It runs to 590 pages and, aside from the indexes and the introduction, every two pages give you something new to admire. On the right hand pages are diagrams, explicit and clear in two colors, for the devices or operations explained on the left hand pages. Once you penetrate you are lost. I have always wondered about the mechanics of the automatic exposure controls in cameras—and now I know. But I also know how the xerox machines work and have been enlightened about the operation of my flying-ball selectric typewriter. (This last was an eye-opener—I had always thought it must have electronic control circuitry in order to bash out 15 strokes a second and store characters—but it turns out to be a completely mechanical set-up.)

My complaints are minor ones. The book was originally published in German, *Wie funktioniert das?*, (How Does It Work?) and in a much larger size, almost twice as big I think. This is an educated guess encouraged by the minuscule size of some of the lettering and diagrams—which are best read with a magnifying glass. The book was translated into Great Britain-English (lift instead of elevator, colour for color) and printed here in offset. Therefore a certain amount of brain-cracking German technicalese comes through, but not too much. It is still a best buy.

(Continued from page 21)

She had it done to her, you know. Figures she can follow him. It'll work if they can stabilize them. If not, at least she'll be only three days behind him. And the dog. They thought the dog would make them both feel better. Hard to see how a

dog could last long, though. How can you control a dog?

The village? Oh, that's simple enough. They were watching a ship land. Our ship. We'd been there two weeks. Sharp man, Bruno.

The End

(Continued from page 50)

lieve when we do, but we will. But right now, we're leaving here. I won't feel completely safe until we're a long way from this place."

"Leaving, just when we've found Moloch's temple?" John Kerr echoed. "Why, you *must* be crazy."

Blaine looked down through the open window at the starlit excavations

yawning beside the peaceful sea.

"Edith and I," he said somberly, "have seen all of Moloch's temple we want to. And from now on, I'm giving up archaeology. From now on, I'm going to let the past stay buried —if it will."

The End

(Continued from page 81)

never be quite the same again. And I'll bet you'll recognize it when it comes out on the market, and when you buy one for yourself. Oh, you'll buy one all right, you'll hardly be able to help buying one.

It'll mean a fortune for me. But more than that, it means I don't have

to sell anything any more. There's something about being a super salesman that gives me a very unpleasant sensation.

There would always be a possibility of my running into a nice beautiful customer who just couldn't be sold.

The End

(Continued from page 93)

There's no reason for you to risk your life. That's the trouble with—"

"There is only one trouble," Karn interrupted. "The women of Mahlo have turned their men into women too."

"You can't talk to me like that!" Andra flared.

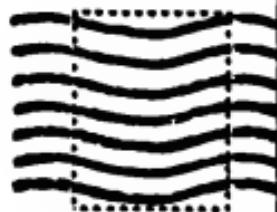
Karn found his men watching him. He had led them to victory over the Green Ones. But with women it was another story. Could he stand up to Andra? They were watching Karn, ready to follow him again. But which way would he go?

"Woman," Karn said, "hold your tongue!"

Her face reddened with anger, then turned white as Karn took a threatening step forward. Her head dropped in submission.

It was victory, complete and final. Before Karn's eyes the men of Mahlo seemed to grow inches taller. Their shoulders straightened. For the first time they were out of bondage. They were men. And it was this man from another world, Karn, who made them so.

The End



According to you...

While we have many new things in the works for this magazine, a letter column was not considered at the present time. It seems that this lack has not stopped readers from writing in—and grateful we are for the correspondence. Here are the first letters received just as we go to press and they are included as a sort of trial balloon. If the response warrants it this column could become a regular feature.

Dear Mr. Harrison:

Congratulations and much success to you and *Fantastic* magazine.

There is a great deal of truth in the last paragraph of your editorial in the January issue of *Fantastic*. I wish (an over used word) that I could write the type of story I would like to read.

Much of science fiction these days seems to be written by people who are not giving enough thought to the reader. Not all of us want to spend time with a dictionary and an encyclopedia in order to understand a story.

Much technical information is

being included which may be of value to a few readers but for reading enjoyment, such information is really uninteresting. For example, a laser gun in hand either is a weapon or tool depending on the story, but the technical points of how it works are not so interesting as whether it kills, heals, destroys, improves, etc. I realize readers who have a lot of time would welcome the technical aspects while I (busy mother, homemaker, full-time secretary) enjoy science fiction for a break away from routine.

I don't enjoy the serious discussion of why a thing is done—it is done, period! A reader shouldn't have to decide against the why it was done if the author is skilled and isn't defending what has happened. The story I like is the one that is telling me something that I have no argument for—the author has made me believe his story. After all, fiction is make believe, isn't it?

Magazines are expensive and I am not able to buy all the ones I would like each month, so I alternate. I have become very selective at the magazine rack.

Again, good luck and here is to better reading.

Claudette Williams (Mrs.)

Dear Sir:

I agree with your editorial—**FOLLOW ME**—in the January 1968 number of *Fantastic* especially when you say, "There seems to be very little fun in fiction these days and I bemoan this loss."

Why are all the fantasy writers so dire and doomy? Let's have a monster, if you must write of such, that cracks a joke. Give us a dragon with wit and wisdom, a raconteur and universe-trotter, whose fantastic powers are boundless, yet he can drop down to Earth and give a Magic Show at the Lake Front Stadium in Chicago.

Give us a kick and a memory by creating characters that are musketeers of the Milky Way, odd, enchanting and miracle mongers, with the glamor and protean behavior of Man himself. In a word give us Man, there is nothing higher or more wonderful.

Ernest W. Brady

• *I'll be only too happy to—just as soon as the writers write them! I'll pass on your advice to them, with the addition that these are the sort of stories I would like to read myself.*

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading the March issue of *Fantastic*, and I think that it's great. One item I really enjoyed was "Fantasy Books" by Fritz Leiber. I sincerely hope that you keep the policy of having a book review in every issue . . .

I came across your magazine

about 2½ years ago, shortly after the Ultimate Publishing Co. took it over. In that short space of time I have seen it grow from a cheap pulp type magazine to one of the best on the market. Keep up the good work.

As a relatively new fan of science fiction (I first came across it in 1954 when I was 8) I have not had the opportunity to read very much of the works before that time. With your magazine (along with *Amazing*) I can do that, and I really appreciate it.

J. Collinson

Dear Editor:

Your magazine has mostly everything, like a letters page, subscription offer, back-issue offer, except you should have a offer for full-color cover prints without any overprinting. You also should have more pages and "Fantastic" should have a big anniversary issue soon. Myself and other readers would like you to have you tell us what story the covers for and who drew it. Try to get more David H. Keller, Ron Goulart, and Theodore Sturgeon stories in your magazine. And please try to print each month a forecast of what's coming.

Stephen Darner

Dear Editor:

Please give us the longer stories in the reprints in all your mags. Most of the reprints you've been using are much too short.

Also please continue the Paul covers and inside illustrations by the original artists . . .

The cover for the January issue of *Fantastic* is the nicest cover you

have produced. I hate to see a conglomeration of titles and names all over the cover.

Here are some suggestions for reprints I would like to see along with some other of the novel length greats of the past: First, "The Universe Wreckers" by Ed. Hamilton, then "Gods of the Jungle" and "When Free Men Shall Stand" by Nelson Bond and, finally, "After an Age" by Eando Binder.

Ned Reece

● *Have always felt that the "good old stuff" deserves to be re-read. However, because of space limitations don't see how we can include some of the real longies—even if they are classics. If you readers would like to see them in "condensed" form, however, drop us a line and maybe we'll be able to work something out.*

Dear Editor:

After some several years abstinence, cosmic currents drew me into the force-field of fantasy and science-fiction.

So I obtained a copy of your January issue of *Fantastic* and was glad to see some familiar names whose stories I used to like. Still like them. Ray Bradbury and Theodore Sturgeon, to my perception, always have portrayed some of the possible beauty and grandeur of the unknown planes of being and becoming . . .

Now, I am so far in the rear-end of progress I do not even know the name of the kindly, intelligent gentleman portrayed in the act of

committing something to inky expression. Is this Fritz Leiber, or your distinguished self? I wonder where I developed the impression that Fritz was "Leibner"?

Makes but nothing. The expression on the gentleman's face indicates a willingness to discuss, so I propose to ask if the title of his story should not be "When Brahm Wakes?" According to my pitiful Sanskrit background, "Brahma" is the wakened and active aspect of the dormant Brahm. Furthermore, according to the oldest literature, which does not permit an extra-cosmic "creator" such as the Christian "God", if the "Supreme Principle" were to be, for a single instant, inactive, the universe would crumble. Was it the philosopher Hegel who wrote, "God is man in heaven; man is God on earth? So on whose grave do we put a memorial to a defunct God? . . .

But for a picture of today . . . Mr. Leiber's story is immense, and it may be just the way to start an awakening. Cannot help wondering how a lot of honorable Christians will take Mr. Leiber's presentation!!

Your policy as outlined in your editorial seems to me quite worthy of an intra-cosmic god of some development, and I hope the "proletariat" will permit and help you to carry it out and grow with it.

Miles MacAlpin

● *To out knowledge Fritz has never been "Leibner"—not even once! But if you're trying to tell us that "Brahm(a)" is one of the great ones—yes it's possible you're right.*



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